FAQs

NCLB FLEXIBILITY WAIVER

August 2014, ISBE Division of Public Information

1. Q: What are the effective dates for the waiver?
   
   A: The waiver goes into effect July 1, 2014, for the 2014-15 school year and is in effect through the 2015-16 school year. Based on precedents in other states, there will be an opportunity to renew the waiver for at least one more year. If Congress reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) or if there is a change in administration, the waiver may be impacted.

2. Q: Where can I read the waiver or a summary of the waiver?
   
   A: You can find detailed information about the No Child Left Behind waiver on the ISBE website.

   - Main NCLB Waiver page: [http://www.isbe.net/nclb_waivers/default.htm](http://www.isbe.net/nclb_waivers/default.htm)

3. Q: Will my school or district receive an Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report or status designation again?
   
   A: Districts and schools will receive one more status designation in fall 2014 based on the results of the spring 2014 state tests, which were taken while Illinois was still operating under all aspects of NCLB. There will be no additional AYP or status designations after fall 2014.

4. Q: How is accountability under this waiver different than the accountability required under NCLB?
   
   A: This is the federal and state attempt to give educators what they have collectively said they want in an accountability system. The plan emphasizes tracking and reporting how
students and schools are progressing from year to year and sets goals that reflect the fact that the starting point varies for each school. Educators have said they don’t mind being held accountable, but they want to be recognized for making progress with their student body and not compared to the progress of a school across the state or even across the country with widely different conditions and demographics. This plan attempts to do just that.

5. Q: How so? How will you offer varied or differentiated goals?

A: Student, school and district academic performance will be reported for accountability purposes through a variety of metrics, called a Multiple Measure Index (MMI), that will report data on graduation rates, achievement in English Language Arts and Mathematics and student achievement gap data, as well as student growth over time and progress narrowing achievement gaps between groups of students.

- Some specific achievement goals for the MMI are not yet refined but there are two overarching performance goals: 1) to cut or reduce by half the percentage of all students who are not meeting proficiency levels within six years and 2) reduce by half the state’s achievement gaps within six years. Schools will be required to cut their gaps by half within six years as well.

- The 2014-15 school year, including Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) results and other metrics, will serve as the baseline year for the MMI, which will debut on the State, District and School Report Card of 2015.

6. Q: What assessments will be given in 2014-15 to be used toward calculating that MMI?

A: All third- through eighth-graders will take PARCC assessments in English language arts and mathematics. At the high school level, students could take up to two PARCC assessments this year in a) English 3, and b) Math 3 or Algebra II upon completion of the course work aligned to specific learning standards in those subjects.

7. Q: Do schools still have to follow rules about how to spend Title I funds?

A: There is much more freedom about spending Title I funds for school improvement under this waiver. The waiver recognizes that local districts and schools know best what services are needed to help their students make necessary improvements.

8. Q: What about required tutoring?

A: Schools in status are no longer obligated to offer Supplemental Educational Services (SES). Districts may want to consider providing after-school or tutoring activities, either on their own or through private entity(ies) of their choosing.
9. **Q: What about School Choice?**
   
   **A:** Schools in status are no longer obligated to offer School Choice, a provision of NCLB. Students who have previously transferred to another school via the “Choice” provision are allowed to stay at that school until they reach the highest grade in the building. However, the district is no longer obligated to pay for transportation.

10. **Q: How will this new plan help low-performing schools improve?**
   
   **A:** The plan calls for more flexibility in terms of federal school improvement funds and tiered levels of intervention and support through the Statewide System of Support (SSoS). This includes the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), Regional Offices of Education, Intermediate Service Centers and the Illinois Center for School Improvement.

11. **Q: How will ISBE classify and identify those schools that need more targeted intervention?**
   
   **A:** Illinois, like much of the nation, is moving away from the punitive language of NCLB and hopes that we will no longer be talking of “failing schools.” Instead we have developed a plan that talks about services to schools where students have historically not performed well in terms of state tests and graduation rates. We’re referring to these services as both “Focus” and “Priority” services for schools of the same name or classification.

12. **Q: What is a Priority School”?**
   
   **A:** A Priority School is a Title I or Title I-eligible school whose three-year average on state assessments is in the lowest 5 percent of the state or whose three-year graduation rate is under 60 percent.

13. **Q: How many schools will receive Priority services?**
   
   **A:** A total of 147 schools in 30 districts were identified and contacted in November 2013.

14. **Q: Where can I find the list of schools receiving Priority services?**
   
   **A:** [http://www.isbe.net/sos/htmls/sip_1003.htm#priority](http://www.isbe.net/sos/htmls/sip_1003.htm#priority)

15. **Q: Will there be additional funds allocated to districts with Priority schools?**
   
   **A:** No. There are no additional Title I or Title II funds for districts with Priority and/or Focus schools. Instead, in consultation with the a district team and the Illinois Center for School Improvement (Illinois CSI), the district will determine an amount up to 20 percent for Priority schools that will be set aside out of the district’s allocation. Districts with Priority schools were eligible for School Improvement Grant 1003 (g) funds during the fiscal year 2015-18 competition in spring 2014.
16. **Q:** Will there be additional services to Priority schools?

**A:** The Illinois CSI staff has been working with district leadership teams in the districts with Priority schools since December 2013.

17. **Q:** What is a Focus school?

**A:** Focus schools are those with the largest achievement gaps between subgroups.

18. **Q:** When will the list of Focus schools be determined?

**A:** We are currently working with the U.S. Department of Education to confirm our definition of a Focus school. The list will be determined in early fall.

19. **Q:** How many schools will be identified as Focus schools?

**A:** At least 10 percent of the Title I schools in the state, or approximately 270 schools, will be identified as Focus schools.

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