**TALKING POINTS**

**Why the NCLB Flexibility Waiver is Good for Schools and Students**

_August 2014, ISBE Division of Public Information_

**It’s a New Day**

Earlier this year, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) received approval for a flexibility waiver from some aspects of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in exchange for a state-developed plan to prepare students for college and careers, focus aid on the neediest students and support effective teaching and leadership. Many of the initiatives have been underway for several years, but the waiver's flexibility and relief from NCLB becomes effective in the 2014-15 school year.

- The waiver gives districts more flexibility in terms of how they can use federal Title I funds and it provides a more meaningful accountability system.

- The waiver builds on a foundation of comprehensive education initiatives already being implemented in public school classrooms around the state and in universities that prepare tomorrow's educators.

- The days of punitive NCLB language and consequences based on one annual test are behind us. This is the federal and state attempt to give educators what they have collectively said they want in an accountability system.

- Educators 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, reporting a variety of metrics.

**Part of Whole System Change**

- Among the foundational pieces in the waiver plan are new Illinois Learning Standards in English language arts and math, which set higher benchmarks for what students should know and demonstrate at each grade level and emphasize higher-order thinking in order
to be ready to succeed in college and careers.

- The next step is to implement a new testing system that has been developed to align to those new standards and also measure college and career readiness.

- Districts will continue to implement a new, more holistic and comprehensive teacher and principal evaluation system, with all schools in the state administering evaluations that include student growth as one measure in student and principal evaluations by 2016-17.
  - Districts are encouraged to pilot the new teacher evaluations before their first year of formal use.
  - Note that the state calls for 25 percent of those evaluations tied to student growth in the first two years and then increasing to 30 percent, but districts and their Joint Committees with teacher representatives can make student growth count for more in local evaluations.
  - The role of teacher practice still makes up the majority of a teacher's evaluation under the state plan.

- We are implementing new ways of helping our neediest schools with more expert support and flexibility under the waiver.

- Districts will receive support services, from general to intensive, depending on need from ISBE, their Regional Offices of Education, Intermediate Centers and the Illinois Center for School Improvement (Illinois CSI).
  - Illinois CSI is continuing to work with our “Priority” districts as they implement turnaround principles as required by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE).
  - Those schools and districts that need the most support will undergo comprehensive changes and be listed in Priority status for at least three more years.
  - ISBE has requested an amendment to the identification of districts that will be identified to receive “Focus” services. Those schools that are identified to receive Focus services will be identified due to low-performing subgroups of students. Their supports and interventions will be directed at that group.

- 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.

- Districts will have more flexibility on how they can use federal Title funds. The 10 percent professional development set aside for districts in status and the 20 percent set aside for
Supplemental Educational Services (SES) and Choice are eliminated.

- Varying student performance goals will allow districts to improve outcomes that take into account the varied starting points of students. This increases local control and gives the districts the ability to decide the right interventions for their low-performing students instead of having NCLB-mandated programs that have questionable effectiveness.

**Metrics for gauging progress**

- This school year, 2014-15, is a baseline year, establishing the metrics for which academic growth is measured against in the future. We know one metric will be results from the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of College and Careers (PARCC), an assessment system designed to measure how well students are mastering the new learning standards and if they’re on track for college and careers.

  - PARCC will replace the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) for third-through eighth-graders in 2014-15 and will replace the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE), which was only given to 11th-graders.

  - The PARCC will assess students in third through eighth grade and during some courses in high school.

  - It will provide more precise information about student comprehension and skills through more engaging exercises and an online format and, ultimately, provide timely data that can help teachers target instruction as needed to improve student learning.

- There are two clear overarching goals under the performance metrics:

  - To cut or reduce by half the percentage of all students who are not meeting proficiency levels within six years.

  - To reduce by half the state’s achievement gaps within six years.

- 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 annual student achievement gap data, as well as student growth over time and progress narrowing achievement gaps between groups of students.

  - ISBE will finalize the metrics and weighting of all metrics to be used in the MMI this fall.
• ISBE will convene accountability experts and stakeholders as we finalize performance and achievement gap goals for specific subgroups.

This is a transition period.

• The waiver went into effect July 1, 2014. Test results from the spring 2014 administration are technically still under NCLB. Any related NCLB sanctions or provisions will not go into effect.
  o ISBE will update districts and families of amendment approvals and waiver implementation through the Superintendent’s Weekly Message, sent to districts each Monday and posted on the ISBE website at www.isbe.net.

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