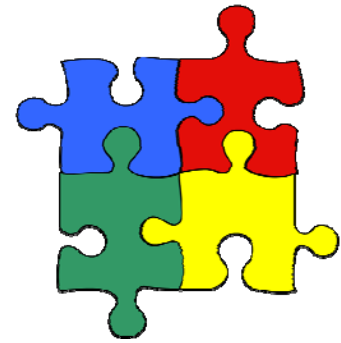


Communicating with Key Groups



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Overview

No Child Left Behind requires that state education agencies publicly release the names of schools and districts that have been identified for improvement. When a school is listed as missing AYP it can generate attention in the media and concern on the part of parents, teachers, and the administration. This section is designed to help you develop a communication strategy for helping all parties understand what this designation means (and does not mean) and how the school will respond.

For a complete perspective on AYP, along with additional contacts and the entire AYP Handbook, visit: http://dpi.wi.gov/ssos/ayp_handbook.html.

Communicating with School Boards

School boards are naturally concerned when a school or district misses AYP. They are often faced with questions from the general public.

How to read the AYP report

All school board members should be familiar with the information included in *No Child Left Behind* testing and accountability reports. In addition, school board members should have a copy of every school AYP report (Annual Review of School Performance) as well as the district AYP report. As part of the process of reviewing the AYP report, a list of potential concerns or questions should be generated regarding schools that have not yet missed AYP criteria but are close to doing so in the future. It is important to develop plans to address those issues.

Why the school or district missed AYP

It is important for boards to communicate the reason for missing AYP. Although boards should not name specific student groups or situations, board members should be aware of and be able to speak to the specific objectives that missed the AYP criteria within the schools or districts.

What teachers and administrators are doing in response to the AYP report

Developing a plan to address the issues and concerns regarding the AYP report is important. This needs to be part of the school and district improvement process and should include goals, rationale, objectives, and action steps to meet the objectives and address the identified issues. A summary of the plans for addressing must also include a timeline.

The fiscal implications, if any, of missing AYP

If a Title I school has been identified for improvement, sanctions such as school choice and supplemental educational services have an impact on how a portion of district Title I resources must be used. The board should be aware of sanction levels, required set asides, how much funding must be diverted to address those sanctions, and whether past activities will no longer be supported. Additional information and resources can be found in Chapters 20 and 21 of the Wisconsin Title I Guidelines (<http://dpi.wi.gov/titleone/guidelines.html>) or at the Supplemental Educational Services in Wisconsin website at: <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/esea/supplemental.html>.

Communicating with Parents

Parents must be assured that their child is going to a school that is effective in helping all children learn. Media reports about *No Child Left Behind* sometimes use terms like “failing schools” when reporting AYP data. Sometimes this raises parent concerns, while other parents can become angry at what they perceive as an unfair label. Both groups will be looking for answers from school staff.

Parents need to know:

What impact missing AYP will have on their children’s education

Be prepared to share with parents the plans the school is considering or has already begun implementing to improve student performance in the assessed areas. Will additional services be available to students? Is the school schedule changing? Is the curriculum or class size under consideration for changes? Schools identified for improvement are required to inform parents of steps being taken to improve student performance.

How the students are performing on state tests

Schools are required to share with parents information about how their child has performed on statewide tests. Be sure this information is understandable, and list a contact person a parent can call to answer questions.

What has been done and what you plan to do to improve the school, and how parents can be involved

Ideally the school or district has identified a role that parents can play in school improvement. Share those options with all parents, and examine opportunities to ensure that they are meaningful. Be flexible about how you gather input from parents; do not limit parent feedback to committees or meetings. Schools identified for improvement are required to make such opportunities available to parents.

Where progress is being made

In addition to the needs identified by the AYP report, share the good news about student achievement. Share examples of progress that has been made, including outstanding accomplishments by staff and students as well as community organizations that have been important partners in achieving success.

How to help their children at home

Parents want their children to succeed, but they sometimes need ideas for ways to support their children’s learning in the most effective way possible. Teachers at every grade level should provide parents with concrete activities families can implement to reinforce learning at home. If the school has a parent liaison, use that person to help answer parent questions and tap the interest the AYP report has generated to get them involved.

For ideas on parent involvement with all aspects of *No Child Left Behind*, refer to *Toolkit for Schools: Involving Parents in No Child Left Behind*, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2004.

Communicating with School Staff

Missing AYP can be a difficult experience for school staff. School leaders need to be prepared to help staff understand the AYP process. Ideally this happens before a school misses AYP.

School staff need to know:

How to read the AYP report

All staff should have a copy of the school and district AYP reports and know how to read them. In addition to helping staff understand why the school missed AYP this year, reviewing the reports can help them see where there have been improvements and which areas they need to be concerned about because the school is close to missing AYP.

What root causes are behind missing AYP

Teachers need time to collect and analyze data related to student achievement. School leaders can utilize resources to help teachers get together and examine test data and other local assessments to better understand the strengths and needs of individual students. This information should form the basis for future decisions about school improvement strategies.

How to talk with parents or community members about AYP

Teachers may be approached with questions about the school's status. They should be comfortable answering these questions, confident they have the facts right, and knowledgeable about where to direct people who ask questions they cannot answer.

What consequences, if any, there will be to the school for missing AYP

If the school has missed AYP for two or more consecutive years, the school becomes a School Identified for Improvement (SIFI). Title I SIFI schools are subject to federal sanctions. All educators need to understand the sanctions that apply each year that the school is in SIFI status and be able to explain them to parents.

How the school will respond to missing AYP

New initiatives, committees, or work groups that are being formed in response to missing AYP must be clear to all staff. The goals, tasks, and timelines must be clearly understood. Teachers should feel comfortable explaining the school's response when parents or community members ask.

Communicating with the Community

As NCLB is addressed more frequently in the media, community members are becoming more aware that a process is in place for identifying schools that do not meet federal standards. School staff must be prepared to explain the challenges and successes related to academic achievement in their school.

Community members need to know:

The school is committed to high achievement for all students

There should be no doubt in the community that school staff are working to help all children succeed. Avoid complaining about or dismissing NCLB in any way that implies the school is making excuses.

School staff believe that all children are capable of success

Holding schools accountable for the performance of subgroups of students can cause frustration that sometimes leads staff to imply that a group of students is to blame for the school missing AYP. Help people understand the challenges of ensuring that every child becomes proficient, and emphasize that the school is committed to doing everything possible to making that a reality. Give examples of efforts under way and your success stories.

The benefits of past improvement efforts

Remember to close the feedback loop. If the community is aware of current school improvement strategies (early release days, alternative programs, tutoring, etc.), what impact have these efforts had on students? Collect and share data about the positive impact the school has seen. For example, if after-school tutoring is provided, data such as the number of children served and the average academic gain can be used to show the positive impact of tutoring. Community members want to know what value school staff are seeing in the resources made available to them. Such information is often shared with the public when resources are requested but less frequently after resources have been allocated.

Communicating with the Media

If your school misses AYP, the state education agency is required by federal law to make that information public. School leaders can be inundated by requests from the media to explain or respond to the situation. In preparing a response for the media, consider the following guidelines:

Be proactive to ensure information is accurate

There are many components of NCLB, and they are often inaccurately reported. Prepare written summaries of the law, especially the AYP process, and give them to local media to use in preparing their stories. It's much easier to help people get it right the first time than to try to correct misunderstandings later.

Be positive

No one disagrees with the intent of NCLB; arguing that the expectations are too high can sound like excuse making. Focus on the goal of closing the achievement gap, and be prepared to say what efforts are under way locally to do so.

Put future initiatives shared with the media in the context of meeting AYP or closing the achievement gap

Schools often get media attention throughout the year for various projects. If a project is designed, even in part, to help with reading, mathematics, attendance, or graduation, talk with the media about the link between those efforts and AYP.

Be forthcoming

The most important thing that schools and districts can do about missing AYP is to be forthcoming with the media. Educators should work to ensure that members of the media have the information necessary to prepare an accurate and thorough story. Most important, be truthful and factual in responding to questions.

Resources for Communicating with Key Groups

Protecting Student Privacy in Wisconsin

<http://www.dpi.wi.gov/lbstat/dataprivacy.html>

Confidential Student Data in Public Reporting

http://www.dpi.wi.gov/lbstat/priv_more.html

Accountability Reports

Wisconsin's Adequate Yearly Progress Report—A database that is searchable by school year and allows you to view district/schools that missed AYP or that are identified as in need of improvement.

<http://www2.dpi.state.wi.us/sifi/>

Schools Identified for Improvement (SIFI) in Wisconsin Districts—View the number and percentage of schools in each district that are identified for school improvement under section 1116(c) and how long the schools have been so identified by years of testing.

<http://www.dpi.wi.gov/oea/acct/aypdata.html>

District and School AYP Report(s)—*Annual Review of School/District Performance Reports* are available electronically from the Online Reporting System (ORS). The district assessment coordinators have passwords to access this site.

<https://wsasors.turnleaf.com>

Wisconsin School Performance Report (SPR)—*Wisconsin Student Assessment System* (WSAS) is where any school or district may view proficiency summary reports. Subjects covered by the WSAS include reading and mathematics at grade three through eight and ten, and language arts, science, and social studies at grades four, eight, and ten. Online proficiency summary reports are provided in table format by gender, race, and other student groups.

<http://www2.dpi.state.wi.us/wsas/>