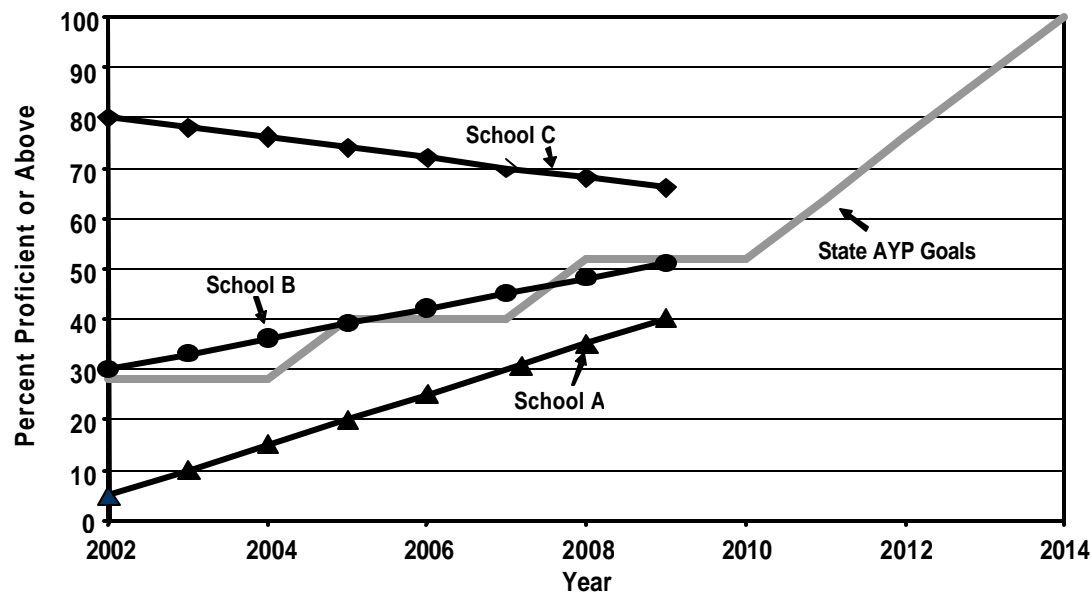


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THE REAUTHORIZED ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT

Which One is the 'Failing' School? Adequate Yearly Progress in NCLB



Source: Robert Linn, University of Colorado at Boulder, National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST), presentation made at the ETS 2003 Invitational Conference, New York City, Oct. 3, 2003.

Q: Which of these schools will NCLB label as failing?

- A. School A
- B. School B
- C. School C
- D. All of the above

The answer is D, all of the above. Sooner or later, all these schools will fail to meet the state's annual target for adequate yearly progress (AYP)—and that's even before the performance of different subgroups of students is considered.

Q: Which school will be identified for NCLB sanctions first?

- A. School A, which at 5 percent proficient begins way below the state's AYP starting point (28 percent proficient) but makes the greatest progress with its students (5 percentage points each year).
- B. School B, which at 30 percent proficient is slightly above the state's AYP starting point and makes steady progress (3 percentage points each year).
- C. School C, which at 80 percent proficient begins well above the state's AYP starting point but has steadily declining student achievement (2 percentage points each year).

(turn over for answer)



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The answer is A. School A would begin to be sanctioned in 2004 and in 2007 could be “reconstituted”—the ultimate sanction—even though it is making the greatest progress with its students.¹ School B, which is making steady progress, would sometimes hit and sometimes just miss AYP. By 2009, it would be classified as a “school in need of improvement,” even though it was continuing to improve. School C, in steady decline, won’t be on an AYP list until 2011, simply because its students were so far ahead of the state’s AYP targets from the start.

Under NCLB’s AYP formula, schools whose students are way behind from the start get sanctioned quickly, even if they’re making impressive gains. In fact, to hit AYP targets, most of these schools would have to increase test scores at a rate that’s never been attained by even the “best” schools.

Is it fair to stigmatize schools that are behind from the start, even when they’re making great progress? Shouldn’t improvement be recognized and rewarded? And shouldn’t the high goals we set for students and schools be attainable rather than impossibly challenging?

Adequate yearly progress: It’s not adequate, and it doesn’t credit progress.

¹ Although it is possible that School A might make AYP through the “safe harbor” provision, it’s unlikely because “safe harbor” stipulates that each and every subgroup not making AYP must decrease its students not scoring “proficient or above” by 10 percent and each subgroup must make progress on other indicators. Our research indicates that very few schools make AYP through “safe harbor.”