

No  
Child  
Left  
Behind

THE REAUTHORIZED ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT

## AFT on English Language Learners and 'Adequate Yearly Progress' Calculations

### What NCLB Says

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires states to measure student performance toward state targets both in the aggregate for “all students,” as well as for every subgroup. One such subgroup is English language learners (ELLs). The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has long supported disaggregation of data. Without it, schools can appear to be doing a good job overall when, instead, they are inadequately serving particular subgroups of their students (for example, their English language learner population). Analysis of disaggregated data is important to help schools know where more is needed.

### Where AFT Stands

The AFT believes that ELL students must be included in the NCLB accountability system, but that the law must be adjusted to include them appropriately. In February 2004, the U.S. Department of Education made two policy changes with respect to the ELL subgroup and adequate yearly progress (AYP) calculations. Specifically, the department will now allow states to exempt students who are new to this country and to the English language from taking the reading/language arts content assessment *for one year*.<sup>1</sup> As required under Title III, ELLs will continue to be tested for English language proficiency. The second recent change announced by the department will allow states, for up to two years, to include in the ELL subgroup students who have attained English proficiency.

While these policy changes are a productive first step, more has to be done to ensure that states and schools are held accountable for the academic achievement of the more than 4.6 million ELL students who attend school in the United States. Even with the recent federal changes, the law’s AYP formula continues to pose two unique challenges for the ELL subgroup.

### Challenge 1: How ELL Subgroups Are Defined Works against Attaining Proficiency

The first major problem revolves around how this subgroup is defined. Once ELLs become proficient in English, they move out of the subgroup, which means that the ELL subgroup functions as a revolving door. The recent policy change—allowing students who have exited the ELL subgroup to count in ELL AYP calculations for two additional years—helps this situation, but falls short of being a full remedy. ELL students should be counted in this subgroup for at least *three* years after they exit. Research has shown that it can take between four and seven years to attain full proficiency in standard academic English. Therefore, additional years of achievement data will allow a more accurate demonstration of proficiency and academic performance.

In addition, the policy change that gives new immigrant students a one-year exemption from taking reading/language arts content tests should be extended to include students who were born in the United States, but who are non-English speakers. Just like new arrivals to the United States, these students also struggle with English when they arrive at school and are rightfully considered part of the ELL subgroup.



A Union of Professionals

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO  
555 New Jersey Ave. N.W.  
Washington, DC 20001  
202/879-4400  
www.aft.org

