



Promoting, Incentivizing and Supporting Continuous Improvement

Over the past two weeks the NCLB Waiver Workgroup has focused largely on schools falling into three categories: Priority, Focus and Reward. In the case of the first two, these schools are the most in need of serious change. The waiver guidance requires the state to focus its resources on schools in those two categories.

However, that leaves 85% of Title I schools outside of the system. Clearly, there must be a system in place to ensure that these schools are continuing to show high levels of student achievement. The waiver request requires a description of how a state plans to accomplish this:

“Describe how the SEA’s differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system will provide incentives and supports to ensure continuous improvement in other Title I schools that, based on the SEA’s new AMOs and other measures, are not making progress in improving student achievement and narrowing achievement gaps, and an explanation of how these incentives and supports are likely to improve student achievement and school performance, close achievement gaps, and increase the quality of instruction for students.”

Meeting this requirement will require the State to utilize several tools in creative ways so that all schools are held accountable for their performance regardless of whether or not they are identified as Priority or Focus. The following are some questions to consider (these questions are also available on the Note Sheets for your table to complete and submit):

1. What should school report cards include? Should they use the chart of federal accountability metrics that we are using to identify Priority, Focus and Reward Schools? Given the federal flexibility around this system, how should non-assessment and graduation data be reported and used?
2. What should be the criteria for being required to take actions? Should we use performance on the chart, AMOs, both or neither? What other factors should be considered? How many years’ worth of data should be considered (e.g. under the current AYP system, schools not making AYP for two consecutive years are identified for improvement)?
3. What should be required of schools that are failing to meet requirements but are not in Priority or Focus status? Should they have to go through a process of diagnosing their problems? Should they have to write improvement plans? Are there other steps they should be required to take?
4. What role should MDE play in intervening within schools that are failing to meet requirements? Should MDE provide tools for diagnosing the problems at schools? Should MDE play the role of auditor to ensure compliance with district-based interventions?