

DEMONSTRATING THAT MINNESOTA'S LIST OF REWARD, PRIORITY, AND FOCUS SCHOOLS MEET ESEA FLEXIBILITY DEFINITIONS

Minnesota generated its list of Reward, Focus, and Priority schools from its overall differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system, the centerpiece of which is the Multiple Measures Rating (MMR). This document demonstrates that our list is consistent with the U.S. Department of Education's suggested definitions.

Reward schools

In order to meet the U.S. Department of Education's definition of a "highest-performing school", a school must:

1. be a Title I school
2. make adequate yearly progress (AYP)
3. exhibit the highest absolute performance
4. exhibit the highest graduation rates (if a high school)
5. be closing achievement gaps.

For demonstration purposes, we used overall proficiency rates to operationalize absolute performance in a way that is consistent with U.S. Department of Education's definition. Eighty-five percent of Title I schools exhibited proficiency rates below 79.2 percent. As such, a school had to exhibit a proficiency rate of 79.2 percent or greater in order to meet the third condition (i.e., "highest absolute performance"). Eighty-five percent of Title I high schools exhibited graduation rates below 91.3 percent. As such, a high school had to exhibit a graduation rate or 79.2 percent or greater in order to meet the fourth condition (i.e., "highest graduation rates"). A Title I school could meet the fifth condition if its growth gap z-score was negative, indicating it contributed to a statewide reduction in achievement gaps.

As shown in the table below, Minnesota's list of Reward schools is consistent with the U.S. Department of Education's definition of a "highest-performing schools". The U.S. Department of Education's definition is rigorous. Only 53 schools met the necessary conditions for qualifying as a "highest-performing school", compared to 125 Reward schools (slightly more than 15 percent of Title I schools). Of the "highest-performing school" schools, 47 (89%) were also Reward schools. Discrepancies can be attributed to Minnesota's high academic standards and its use of Multiple Measures for differentiated recognition, accountability, and support.

Reward (Minnesota Department of Education)	Not Highest Performing (U.S. Department of Education)	Highest Performing (U.S. Department of Education)
No	0	6
Yes	78	47
Sum	78	53

Priority schools

Minnesota and the U.S. Department of Education define priority schools as those that meet the following conditions:

1. among lowest five percent of Title I schools in terms of achievement and lack of progress
2. exhibits graduation rate less than 60 percent over a number of years (if a high school)
3. School Improvement Grants (SIG) schools.

As shown in the table below, Minnesota's list of Priority schools is consistent with the U.S. Department of Education's definition. The MMR's achievement and growth measures operationalize achievement and progress, respectively. A total of 42 schools, or five percent of all Title I schools, were required to be identified. Of the Priority schools, 19 were SIG schools and 28 were Priority C schools (neither SIG nor low-graduation-rate schools). No Priority Schools were identified based solely on their graduation rates, but five Priority Schools exhibited graduation rates of less than 60 percent. These five schools were identified as Priority Schools due to a combination of low-achievement, low-progress, and low graduation rates. The final count of Priority schools (48) exceeds the required number (42) because fractions were rounded up during the proportional ranking process.

Category of Priority Schools	Number of Schools
Total number of priority schools required to be identified	42
C. Among lowest five percent of Title I (achievement/progress)	29
D. Graduation rate less than 60 percent	0
E. SIG school	19

Focus schools

Minnesota and the U.S. Department of Education define focus Title I schools as:

- having a subgroup or subgroups exhibiting low achievement
- high schools with low graduation rates not identified as Priority.

Minnesota has made a strategic, data-driven decision to hold schools accountable for growth gaps because students who have economic and other educational advantages exhibit higher achievement *and* higher growth. Closing achievement gaps will require disadvantaged groups to grow at a faster rate than their advantaged peers. For this demonstration, we have operationalized achievement gaps as growth gaps, consistent with the MMR and our theory of action. Additionally, we do not define growth gaps within schools. By comparing the growth of a lower-performing group in a school to the statewide mean of the corresponding higher-performing group, it prevents schools from getting credit if the achievement of the higher-performing student group falls in that particular school.

Using the growth gaps measure and graduation rates, the following table demonstrates that Minnesota meets the U.S. Department of Education's guidelines for identifying the appropriate number of Focus schools overall and by category. The final count of Focus schools (86) exceeds

the required number (84) because fractions were rounded up during the proportional ranking process.

Category of Focus schools	Number of schools
Total number of schools required to be identified as focus schools	84
Total number of schools on list generated based on Focus MMR rating (AYP determinations for disadvantaged groups only; growth gap z-scores)	83
High schools with low graduation rates not identified as Priority	3