



COMMISSION ON
NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

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**The Commission's Recommendations in Practice:
What the New N-Size Policy Would Mean in California**

The Commission will release occasional briefs to illustrate the impact of its No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) recommendations on schools and communities if they were put into practice.

The Commission's N-Size Recommendation

Perhaps the most important aspect of the accountability systems under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is the requirement to disaggregate school performance data and to hold schools accountable for ensuring that all groups of students make adequate yearly progress (AYP). More than any other provision, this feature is critical to ensuring that the statute achieves its goal of leaving no child behind.

In practice, though, many states have allowed schools to omit significant numbers of students by setting large minimum sizes (N-sizes) for calculating subgroups' performance and by using high confidence intervals. Used appropriately, these measures are needed to maintain statistical reliability and protect student privacy, but they can be—and have been—abused. As a result, large numbers of schools have not been held accountable for the performance of significant numbers of students.

To ensure that large numbers of students do not remain “invisible,” the Commission recommends strengthening school accountability requirements by restricting the minimum subgroup size to no more than 20 students and confidence intervals to no more than 95 percent. We recommend that the U.S. Secretary of Education have waiver authority to increase the maximum N-size to 30 students in cases where states can justify such a number. This recommendation would eliminate abuses in percentage-based N-sizes currently employed by some states while upholding statistical accuracy and closing loopholes. We must hold state and district leaders to high standards to ensure accountability for the achievement of all students.

Impact: Schools will be held accountable for improving the performance of more students, particularly groups of students who are traditionally low performing.

Currently, too many schools are being deemed as meeting AYP when, in fact, those schools are not adequately educating certain subgroups of students. The Commission believes this is unacceptable. Schools should not be allowed to mask the lack of adequate progress among certain students by using a high N-size to omit the achievement of those students in final accountability decisions.

To better understand how the policy will work in practice, the Commission examined the potential impact of its N-size recommendation on a key state—California. California is significant because of its large numbers of students and its relatively high N-size for subgroups. The N-size across states ranges from 5 to 100, and the average is 40. California has an N-size definition that combines percentages and minimum numbers. Currently in California, the N-size is 100 students, or 50 students if that subgroup population is at least 15 percent of the total enrollment.

If the Commission’s recommendations were applied to California, the state would have to significantly lower its N-size. Therefore, California schools would be accountable for the academic achievement of large numbers of students currently not considered in AYP calculations. Using 2005–2006 data, the Commission found that many more California schools would not make AYP because they were not meeting all students’ needs. This means more schools will be in school improvement, which may concern some. The more important result, however, is that more parents in California would be assured that their school is being held accountable for their children’s performance and that their children will get necessary academic support.

For example, under the Commission’s recommendations, more students with disabilities would be part of California’s accountability system. Currently 117,176 students with disabilities and 1,032 schools with subgroups of students with disabilities are included in the accountability system. Under the Commission’s recommendations, 38,165 more students with disabilities—a total of 155,341 students—would be included in the accountability system and 5,574 more schools—a total of 6,606—would be held accountable for the achievement of these students. Clearly, under the current N-size, too many schools are not being held accountable for improving the performance of students with disabilities.

California is missing large numbers of children in other subgroups as well. For example, under the Commission’s recommendations, significantly more African American students would be counted in California’s accountability system: 95,861 more African American students—a total of 274,385 students—would be included in the accountability system and 2,383 more schools—a total of 3,605—would be held accountable for the achievement of African American students. The data for each subgroup tells the same story. (See charts 1 and 2 below for complete data on California student subgroups and schools.)

The Commission's recommendations ensure that schools pay attention to the achievement of more students—especially those most in need of support. Parents should feel confident that their children are included in accountability systems so those children get proper attention and support when schools struggle to meet their needs.

Related Articles and Papers

Associated Press. “2 Million scores ignored in ‘No Child’ loophole.” April 17, 2006.

Education Week. “AYP Rules Miss Many in Spec.Ed.” September 21, 2005.

**Chart 1 - More Students Would Be Counted:
Impact of the Recommended N-Size on the Number of
Students Included in AYP in California**

Subgroup	Current N-Size	Recommended N-Size	Additional Students Counted
Students With Disabilities	117,176	155,341	38,165
Economically Disadvantaged	2,036,613	2,094,996	58,383
English Language Learners	1,117,053	1,269,558	152,505
African American	178,524	274,385	95,861
Asian	208,707	291,624	82,917
Filipino	27,487	71,497	44,010
Hispanic	1,817,897	1,880,876	62,979
Native American	1,583	7,786	6,203
Pacific Islander	196	4,482	4,286
White	1,072,604	1,151,232	78,628

**Chart 2 – More Schools Would be Held Accountable for More of Their Students:
Impact of the Recommended N-Size on the Number of
Schools Included in AYP in California**

Subgroup	Current N-Size	Recommended N-Size	Additional Schools Accountable for Subgroup
Students With Disabilities	1,032	6,606	5,574
Economically Disadvantaged	6,396	7,797	1,401
English Language Learners	4,295	6,758	2,463
African American	1,222	3,605	2,383
Asian	1,240	3,342	2,102
Filipino	207	1,393	1,186
Hispanic	6,010	7,593	1,583
Native American	1,583	7,786	6,203
Pacific Islander	2	145	143
White	4,734	6,617	1,883

*Commission analysis of data from the California Department of Education
(<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ay/aypdatafiles.asp>).*

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