

# FAQs on Kentucky's New Assessment and Accountability System for Public Schools



## **Q: What is the Unbridled Learning Assessment and Accountability System and how long has it been in effect?**

A: It is Kentucky's system for testing public school students and holding schools and district's accountability for the student's performance. Unbridled Learning tells parents how their students are progressing toward college/career-readiness and tells educators and the public how a particular school or district is performing.

In 2009, Kentucky's legislature passed Senate Bill 1, which affected many existing laws related to public school assessment and accountability. The bill suspended the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS), which was the means by which public schools were held accountable at the state level, and called for a new system of testing and measurement, plus new academic standards in core subjects.

Kentucky adopted the Common Core Standards in reading and math in 2010, and schools started teaching the new standards in the 2011-12 school year. Students were first tested on the new standards in the spring of 2012 with scores reported that year in late fall. This is the second year for the Unbridled Learning System.

## **Q: What about NCLB?**

A: Until last year, Kentucky provided accountability information for its public schools in two separate ways – one for state purposes, one for federal purposes. Schools and districts received two “scores” based on the requirements of 2001's federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, state laws and regulations.

In September 2011, the U.S. Department of Education announced that states could apply for flexibility under NCLB, meaning that states could develop and use their own accountability models, instead of reporting data based on the standard NCLB model.

Kentucky was in the midst of developing a new state-level testing and accountability system, and state leaders decided to apply for NCLB flexibility to use the new model as a single means of gauging school and district performance. The U.S. Department of Education granted this flexibility to Kentucky in February 2012.

This means that Kentucky's public schools and districts now have only one classification that will serve both federal and state purposes.

## **Q: What happened to AYP?**

A: AYP, or adequate yearly progress, was the measure used under NCLB to determine whether schools were doing well. If a school made AYP, it was not subject to consequences.

In the new system, the term “AYP” will not be used. Instead, each school and district will have an annual measureable objective (AMO) to meet. That AMO will be a number from 0 to 100, and a school's/district's overall score will determine whether it makes its AMO.

Because the data for this release is a baseline, schools and districts won't have an AMO for 2012.

**Q: How is the AMO calculated?**

A: The AMO for 2013 is based on a statistical model that requires a school to have significant gain of scores over time. Technically, the AMO is based on a standard deviation, but that word is confusing for those not trained in statistics. Here's a way to think of it:

If the average overall score for elementary schools is 50, and there is a standard deviation of 21, it would mean a school's AMO would require the school to move 7 points in five years (1/3 improvement over five years). School A is at a score of 29 (21 points below the average of 50, or one standard deviation below the mean). School A would need to move from 29 to 36 in five years. Annually, the school would need to improve approximately 1.5 points a year.

Last year after state averages were computed, improvement goals were set for each school. This will be the first year we can assess whether the goals are too low or too high; however, the goals were set with knowledge of past improvement from other Kentucky testing systems.

**Q: Can the test scores and accountability measures be compared to previous years?**

A: The only comparisons that can be made are to last year's results (except for graduation rate which is not comparable to the past).

**Q: There's a lot of data coming out. What should be the primary focus?**

A: The Unbridled Learning accountability model has many levels of data, and those levels could spur reporters to produce a series of stories or informational items. It may not be possible to provide details on all the levels of data on the date that the embargo is lifted, so here is a suggested priority list:

1. Report on a school's or district's overall score, percentile rank and classification.
2. Report on the percentages of students performing at the various levels in each subject area, on K-PREP, end-of-course and other tests.
3. Report on college/career readiness and graduation rates.
4. Report on achievement gap and growth data.
5. Report on disaggregated data.

**Q: How are scores calculated?**

A: Schools and districts receive points in each of the five main areas covered by the accountability model.

**Achievement**

For reading, mathematics, science, social studies and writing, one point is awarded for each percent of students scoring proficient or distinguished. One-half point is awarded for each percent of students scoring apprentice. No points are awarded for novice students. Schools and districts may earn bonus points for students that score at the distinguished level -- each percent distinguished earns an additional one-half point, and the percent novice earns a negative one-half point, so that when the distinguished and novice values are combined, the novice points may offset the distinguished bonus.

## Gap

Kentucky's goal is 100 percent proficiency for all students. The distance from that goal or gap is measured by creating a student Gap Group — an overall count of student groups that have historically had achievement gaps. Student groups combined include ethnicity/race (African American, Hispanic, Native American), Special Education, Poverty (free/reduced-price meals) and Limited English Proficiency that score at proficient or higher. To calculate the combined student Gap Group, non-duplicated counts of students who score proficient or higher and are in the student groups would be added together. This will yield a single gap number of proficient or higher students in the Student Gap Group, with no student counting more than one time, and all students in included groups being counted once.

## Growth

The Growth category uses a Student Growth Percentile, comparing an individual student's score to the student's academic peers. It recognizes schools and districts for the percentage of students showing typical or higher levels of growth. The scale for growth is determined at equal intervals, with typical growth beginning at the 40th percentile. For elementary and middle schools, growth is based on annual reading and mathematics tests in grades 3-8. At high school, the same model of recognizing student performance along a scale uses the PLAN (grade 10) and ACT (grade 11) composite scores in reading and mathematics for comparison. Points are awarded for percentage of students showing typical or higher growth.

## College/Career Readiness

A readiness percentage is calculated by dividing the number of high school graduates who have successfully met an indicator of readiness for college/career with the total number of graduates. The indicators of readiness include student performance on the ACT, completion of college placement tests or attainment of career academic and technical benchmarks. For the middle school level, college readiness is based on student performance on the EXPLORE assessment administered at Grade 8. The percent of students meeting the ACT-established benchmarks for EXPLORE in reading (15), English (13) and mathematics (17) will be reported. The percent of students meeting the benchmark in each content area is averaged to generate a middle school college readiness percentage.

## Graduation Rate

A graduation rate for each school and district is reported annually, and the rates receive a weighted point total, just as the other four components will.

## Weights

The table below shows the weighting of each of the five areas.

Grade Range	Achievement	Gap	Growth	College/Career Readiness	Graduation Rate	Total
Elementary	30%	30%	40%	N/A	N/A	100%
Middle	28%	28%	28%	16%	N/A	100%
High	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%	100%

The point totals for all areas are weighted and added up to form the overall score.

**Q: What are the new labels for schools and districts?**

A: First, the overall district scores are ranked in order; overall school scores are ranked in order by level – elementary, middle and high. Based on where they are in the order, schools and districts will fall into one of three main classifications:

- **Distinguished** – the top 10 percent of districts or schools from a particular level (90th percentile)
- **Proficient** – in the top 30 percent of districts or schools from a particular level (70th percentile)
- **Needs Improvement** – schools/districts falling outside of the Proficient or Distinguished categories and not meeting their AMOs (at or below the 69th percentile)

If schools/districts meet their AMOs, student participation rates for the “all students” group and each subgroup, and graduation goals, they also will receive a “Progressing” designation.

Then, schools and districts can receive other classifications, based on their performance.

- **Kentucky Schools/Districts of Distinction:** the highest-performing elementary, middle and high schools or districts – those with overall scores at the 95th percentile or higher
- **Kentucky Highest-Performing Schools/Districts:** elementary, middle and high schools or districts with overall scores at the 90th percentile or higher
- **Kentucky High-Progress Schools/Districts:** Title I and non-Title I schools showing the highest progress, as compared to their peers, and districts showing the highest progress, as compared to their peers
- **Kentucky Focus Schools/Districts:** schools and districts with low achievement gap scores; high schools with graduation rates below 60 percent for two consecutive years; and schools with low scores among student gap groups
- **Kentucky Priority Schools/Districts:** schools identified as Persistently Low-Achieving (PLA) as defined by KRS 160.346 (NOTE: no new PLA schools are identified this year.); districts with overall scores in the bottom 5 percent for all districts that have failed to make their AMOs and show adequate yearly progress for the last three consecutive years

**Q: What are Delivery Targets?**

A: The Kentucky Department of Education is using Delivery as a method to establish yearly targets and five-year targets to help schools, districts and our state meet these expectations.

**Calculation of State Delivery Target**

Each state target is calculated using the same formula. For example, the state target for College and Career Readiness (CCR) was computed using the following formula:

The state CCR baseline rate in 2010 is 34%. To compute the five-year target, this rate is subtracted from 100 ( $100 - 34 = 66$ ), then divided by 2 ( $66/2 = 33$ ) and added back to the 2010 baseline score ( $34 + 33 = 67$ ). This results in a state CCR five-year delivery target of 67%.

**Calculation of School and District Delivery Yearly Targets**

School and district five-year delivery targets are calculated using the same formula, then divided by 5 to establish annual delivery targets. For example, a school with a 2010 baseline score of 34% would have a five-year target of 67%. The difference between the school's baseline and five-year target ( $67 - 34 = 33$ ) is then divided by 5 ( $33/5 = 6.6$ ) to give the incremental gains needed to meet the five-year delivery target. This increase is added to the baseline score and also to subsequent years to create the annual delivery targets.