

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS RELATED TO DIFFERENTIATED ACCOUNTABILITY

Florida Department of Education
Bureau of School Improvement
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Frequently Asked Questions Related to Differentiated Accountability

General Questions

1. How does Florida's Differentiated Accountability Model differ from the School Improvement requirements under NCLB?

The Florida model provides alignment and integration of the federal and state accountability systems to allow implementation of school improvement strategies that will have the greatest impact on low-performing schools. The model differentiates among schools based on school grade and percent of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) criteria met.

2. Why were school districts required to implement the Differentiated Accountability requirements this school year?

We understand the concerns about the timelines for implementation. The US Department of Education requested that selected pilot states implement the model in the 2008-09 school year. We have provided flexibility in implementing all requirements for schools other than Intervene and Correct II. It is imperative that these schools implement the Differentiated Accountability Plan this school year before students fall farther behind.

3. What is the process for flexibility and phasing in various provisions of the differentiated accountability model?

Priority for implementation in the 2008-09 school year must be given to Intervene, F, and Repeating F schools. For Correct II schools, districts must make every effort to ensure implementation during this school year. In cases of non-compliance, the district must have a comprehensive plan for addressing the requirement.

4. Who directs interventions for Category I and Category II schools?

For Category I schools, the district and school are responsible for implementing and monitoring the Differentiated Accountability requirements without state oversight. Category II schools are subject to increased state oversight.

5. What is the status of implementation to date?

All Intervene, Repeating F, and F schools are either in full compliance or working on attaining compliance. Details on this matter will be reported to the State Board in December.

6. Districts will be reported to the legislature with a recommendation for legislative action if they fail to comply with a state statute or rule. What types of recommendations are anticipated?

Recommendations will be made on a case-by-case basis dependent upon the extent of non-compliance.

7. What is a "model Title 1 school"?

Model Title I Schools are defined by the FDOE as current Title I schools that earned an "A", have met AYP, and are not in SINI status.

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Adequate Yearly Progress

1. Why is the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) threshold for Category I 80%?

The general concept between Category I and II is that Category I schools are those that are missing relatively few AYP criteria and therefore require more focused service, whereas Category II schools face more widespread issues and require more comprehensive services. Holding to that concept, the threshold of 80% AYP criteria met along with school grades of “A”, “B”, or “C” was used to differentiate between Category I and Category II. 80% AYP criteria met translates to a school missing up to seven criteria. Moving the bar to 70% would translate to schools missing up to 11 criteria. This was a key element of the application to the federal government for the Differentiated Accountability Pilot.

With increased rigor, 80% could be viewed as too lenient a threshold (i.e., does missing seven criteria really translate to focused problems?). Further, this strategy is one that focuses on ensuring that students are getting the most benefit from services and interventions.

2. Can the State’s NCLB accountability plan be revised to address Writing and Safe Harbor?

The Department is willing to reconsider this issue.

Intervene Status

1. What are the criteria for an Intervene school to exit that status?

In order to exit Intervene status, an Intervene school must:

- Increase the school’s letter grade to a “C” or higher **and**
- Increase the overall percentage of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) criteria met by 5% in reading and mathematics. 5% means moving one non-AYP subgroup in reading and one non-AYP subgroup in mathematics to proficiency. AYP can be attained through proficiency, safe harbor, or the growth model.

2. Does the restructuring of Intervene schools as career institutes only apply to high schools? What is the state’s definition of a career institute?

The career institutes option has been removed from the list of restructuring choices for Intervene schools.

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Charter Schools

1. What oversight does the district have when addressing charter school compliance with the requirements of Differentiated Accountability?

Charter schools that receive Title I, Part A funds are required to implement all Title I school improvement requirements. In addition, charter schools graded “D” or “F” are subject to increased state intervention, in conjunction with the charter governing board. School districts are encouraged to work with charter governing boards and to renegotiate charters to ensure accountability for student performance.

2. Is it the district’s responsibility or the charter agency’s responsibility to implement the Differentiated Accountability Model?

The Governing Board is in charge of creating a plan; the district must approve the plan and provide additional resources as applicable in alignment with the Differentiated Accountability requirements.

Regional Support System

1. Will the Regional Executive Directors permit more time for implementation of requirements if the request is reasonable?

This is the first year and there may be areas for flexibility, but careful attention must be given to Correct II and Intervene schools. Issues surrounding Pay for Performance and Differentiated Pay will require patience due to the collective bargaining process.

2. Can the union be involved or have a representative serve on the Regional Support System team?

The Regional Teams consist of an Executive Director with a prior history of improving school performance and Instructional Specialists with content-area knowledge. Union representatives are encouraged to contact the Regional Directors with questions and concerns.

3. How will the Regional Leaders, School Improvement Facilitators, and Connecting Partners be identified?

Regional Executive Directors were identified through a search conducted by the Department. These are individuals with prior administrative experience and a success record of turning around low-performing schools. The Instructional Specialists have been hired directly by the Directors and are content-area and pedagogy experts. Connecting Partners are identified by both the Department and the Directors.

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4. Will the school district have any input into the composition of the Regional Teams?

The teams have been assembled and are currently working in all Intervene, Repeating F, F, and selected Correct II schools.

5. Will additional personnel be hired or contracted to serve at this level? If so, what will be the process for identifying, hiring, and/or contracting with these individuals?

Please see the response to Question 4 in this section.

Funding

1. With the status of school district budgets for 2008-09, will Correct II and Intervene schools be required to provide extended-day or after-school programs for remediation and enrichment?

Yes, Correct II and Intervene schools are required to provide extended-day and/or after school-programs. For non-Title I schools, remediation may be provided during the school day through pull-out programs with minimal disruption to the educational program.

2. With the continuing budgetary shortfalls, what fund sources are available to hire the staff required under Differentiated Accountability?

Districts can utilize Title I, Part A, Title I School Improvement, Title II, Part A, Title III, Supplemental Academic Instruction, and the Reading Allocation in alignment with program requirements.

3. Are there any additional funds to implement the program? If so, how much and from where?

Districts have been appropriated Title I School Improvement funds (Sections 1003(a) and (g)), in the amount of \$43.8 million, which may be used to support implementation of Differentiated Accountability in Title I schools. Title II, Part, A, Title III, IDEA, Supplemental Academic Instruction, and the Reading Allocation can be used in both Title I and non-Title I schools to support Differentiated Accountability.

4. Do school districts have discretion in redirecting funds to low- performing schools? What are the limits to the district's discretion, if any?

School districts may elect to redirect federal and state funding designed to assist high-poverty schools and/or at-risk students, such as Title I, Part A, Basic, Title I School Improvement funds, Title I, Part C, Title II, Part A, Title II, Part D, Title III, Title VI, and/or Supplemental Academic Instruction funds in alignment with the requirements for these programs to meet the requirements of the Differentiated Accountability Plan.

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- 5. What state funds are subject to being withheld for non-compliance?**
FDOE may place a condition on federal grant awards and/or state discretionary grants if a district does not ensure compliance with the Differentiated Accountability Model.
- 6. Will any schools that have met AYP requirements lose funding as a function of this initiative?**
Funding may be withheld or conditions placed on grant awards only in cases of severe non-compliance. In addition, the Department does not allocate funds directly to schools; it is the district's discretion how funds are allocated, notwithstanding federal and state requirements.
- 7. Will districts that have already submitted Title I and II grant proposals for 2008-09 be able to revise their proposals and do budget amendments?**
Yes, federal grants may be amended at any time during the school year.

Improvement Planning

- 1. What is the peer review process for plan development and implementation?**
The peer review is a Title I requirement. School districts are required to conduct peer reviews of school improvement plans within 45 days of submission to the district (sec. 1116(b)(3)(e)).
- 2. Is the Differentiated Accountability plan replacing other plans for Restructuring and Repeating Fs?**
Yes, the intent is to merge the previous Tier System for Restructuring and the Assistance Plus program. Restructuring requirements in the Differentiated Accountability matrix replace the state Tier system for Tiers 3-7. Repeating F school requirements have been incorporated into the matrix.
- 3. Do our schools have to implement Differentiated Accountability and another School Improvement/Corrective Action/Restructuring Plan for Title I School Improvement?**
No, the required interventions should be incorporated into existing school and district plans.
- 4. Please clarify the statement, "Implement a Corrective Action Plan in Year 3."**
As in the past, once a school has not made AYP for four consecutive years, a corrective action plan must be implemented the following school year.
- 5. What are the requirements for an "outside expert" for a school in Corrective Action?**
An outside expert may be a contracted evaluator from a professional organization, a college/university professor, a district administrator from a neighboring school

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district, or a retired district administrator who has a previous record of improving school achievement and can be objective in evaluating current improvement efforts.

- 6. With school accountability data coming out in June/July, how should a school plan to implement a new school reform model by the beginning of the year?**
School districts should begin planning for possible implementation of a school reform model based on progress monitoring data. While these data do not impact school grades and AYP, they should be a predictor of achievement.
- 7. When does the planning for the restructuring process occur?**
Planning for restructuring occurs as it has in the past, after a school has not made AYP for five consecutive years (SINI 4).
- 8. Is there flexibility in implementing restructuring plans for schools that were planning for restructuring in 2007-08?**
Schools should implement the restructuring plan that was developed during the 2007-08 school year unless a district was offering only professional development or data indicate that other changes to the plan are necessary. However, it is anticipated that districts plan to implement the model fully by the start of the next school year and that restructuring plans are revised accordingly.
- 9. Will the Tier levels be removed from the SINI 4, 5, and 6s?**
The state Tiers for restructuring are no longer applicable.

Leadership

- 1. What criteria should districts use to assign principals with a clear record of increasing student achievement in targeted areas in a similar school type and setting?**
The assignment of principals should be based on: 1) a previous record of increasing student proficiency; 2) increasing proficiency specifically in the area(s) that the receiving school did not make AYP; and 3) increasing achievement in a school with the same grade span and similar demographics as the receiving school (e.g. elementary to elementary).
- 2. When reference is made to principals' and leadership teams' record of prior success in increasing student achievement in targeted subgroups, what data should be used to determine prior success?**
When determining the prior success record of principals and leadership teams, student achievement data, School Grade, Adequate Yearly Progress, and subgroup achievement should be analyzed. For a new principal, the prior record as an Assistant Principal may be utilized when determining success in increasing achievement.

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- 3. Can an assistant principal's credentials in "turning around a school" meet the requirements for Leadership for Correct II and Intervene schools if it was too late to change this principal for this school year?**

Effective assistant principals are certainly a benefit to the principal. However, the principal is the instructional leader and sets the tone for the school. It is difficult for the assistant principal to take on that leadership role with an ineffective principal.

- 4. Can the professional partner for the school principal be someone from the district or must it be contracted services?**

Yes, a professional partner could be a retired principal with a successful track record or a district administrator who was a principal with a successful track record.

- 5. Are professional partners for principals also "mentors?"**

Yes, the purpose of the professional partner for the school leader is to provide support for that leader in the form of mentoring, coaching, or other assistance appropriate to further the school's improvement and the leader's development. The professional partner may be selected and provided through the state's William Cecil Golden Professional Development Program (WCG) or may be another contracted individual or entity. Professional Partners obtained through the WCG Program are provided at no cost to the district.

- 5. Charter school law allows principals of charter schools to have varied backgrounds and certificates. Will they be held to the same requirements as public school principals?**

Florida Statutes are silent on the qualifications of the principal. Each charter may contain requirements and should be reviewed to determine appropriate placement of principals.

- 6. Would a member of the leadership team at a charter school have to meet the criteria regarding previous success record even if the person is not on campus every day?**

The criteria should be the same for a charter school as for a traditional public school.

Educator Quality

- 1. Do NCLB requirements relating to "Highly Qualified" teachers and paraprofessionals apply to the non-Title schools?**

All paraprofessionals in Title I and non-Title I Prevent II and Correct II schools must meet the highly qualified requirements defined under NCLB. However, non-Title I schools have a one-year reprieve to plan to meet the requirements at the start of the 2009-10 school year. All teachers are required to meet the highly qualified requirements.

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2. How will “highly effective teachers” be determined?

Highly effective teachers are those who can improve the achievement of subgroups not making AYP in reading, mathematics, and writing. The district should be able to utilize its appraisal system for current employees, based on the requirements of section 1012.34, F.S., to make this determination. If the district is recruiting teachers to these positions to fill vacancies, the employment process should include methods to seek out this type of prior successful experience.

3. How are teachers in need of improvement defined?

“In need of improvement” means that the teacher has been determined to perform at an overall less than satisfactory level as defined in sections 1012.33 and 1012.34, Florida Statutes. If at the end of the year, it has been determined that the teacher is not meeting standards as defined in the district’s performance appraisal system, the district would need to reassign that teacher.

4. Correct II and Intervene schools must be fully staffed by the first day of school. What flexibility is being granted this year and in future years?

Correct II and Intervene schools must be fully staffed at the beginning of the school year and all mid-year vacancies must be filled at those schools. This process is to be determined by the local school district.

5. The model calls for performance pay at Correct II and Intervene schools. What is the authority in either state or federal statutes for this provision?

Section 1012.22 requires that a district school board, in determining its salary schedule, must base a portion of each employee’s compensation on their performance.

6. How can school districts address performance pay with the teacher’s union?

The Department will continue to work with districts on this issue and will work with Florida Association of District School Superintendents (FADSS) and Florida Educational Association (FEA) to ensure stakeholder consensus.

7. Will the requirement that performance appraisals be “primarily” based on student achievement be more clearly defined?

“Primarily” is defined as fifty-one percent of the performance appraisal being based on student achievement.

8. The district must ensure that the performance appraisal process is implemented “with fidelity”. How is that defined?

With fidelity means as instructed in the district’s appraisal system documentation. The appraisal system should meet requirements of section 1012.34, Florida Statutes, including that the district must train staff on implementing the plan and inform personnel of the process. All stakeholders must have a common understanding of the expectations of the appraisal process and the evaluation tool is used consistently across all schools and classrooms.

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9. Can differentiated pay include credential pay for advanced degrees, critical shortage areas, extra teaching period, or alternative education?

Differentiated pay “may” include any additional bonus or salary compensation for any reason the district chooses. Differentiated Pay “must” be provided for the four reasons listed in Section 1012.22(1)(c)4, Florida Statutes:

4. Beginning with the 2007-2008 academic year, each district school board shall adopt a salary schedule with differentiated pay for both instructional personnel and school-based administrators. The salary schedule is subject to negotiation as provided in chapter 447 and must allow differentiated pay based on district-determined factors, including, but not limited to, additional responsibilities, school demographics, critical shortage areas, and level of job performance difficulties.

Please note that the “critical shortage areas” referenced in this statute are not limited to the official statewide critical shortage areas determined annually by the state, but may include areas that the district determines local shortage areas.

10. What is meant by “monitoring” the district use of differential pay?

The Department will review the extent to which districts are implementing differentiated pay or where they are in the process of negotiating differentiated pay in alignment with the requirements of Section 1012.22, Florida Statutes.

11. What is the definition of “relevant staff” and under what conditions will they be replaced in each of the five categories?

Relevant staff are those that either do not meet the highly qualified and/or certified in-field requirements, and those who have not attributed to increased student achievement in subgroups not making AYP. Increased student achievement is defined as 60% of students making learning gains.

12. What is the specific legal authority to “declare an emergency to suspend contract agreements...” as it relates specifically to Differentiated Accountability?

State Board Rule 6A-1.09981(11)(c), Implementation of Florida’s System of School Improvement and Accountability, provides that when a school receives a grade of D or F, “The local school board is authorized to declare an emergency in order to negotiate special provisions of its contract with appropriate bargaining units to implement programs and strategies needed to improve student performance as specified in Section 1001.42(19), Florida Statutes.” If the contract prevents improvements in student achievement, the district can choose to declare an emergency.

13. For coaches and/or teachers of subgroups that did not make AYP, must they have certification in hand or can they be working towards certification (i.e. taking classes)?

The requirement is for certification in hand.

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14. Are there guidelines for the number of coaches per school?

For Repeating F schools, enrollment parameters for the number of coaches apply, capped at four. For Repeating F schools, the district must provide one reading and one mathematics/science coach per five hundred enrolled students. For each additional two hundred and fifty students, the district provides an additional half time reading coach for a maximum of four coaches per school. The designation of mathematics or mathematics/science coaches is based upon student achievement data.

For non-Repeating F schools, the requirement is one reading and one mathematics/science coach. Schools with less than two hundred students may hire a part-time reading and a part-time mathematics coach.

15. What are the criteria for a "lead teacher"?

A lead teacher is a teacher within a Lesson Study Group (LSG) or other Professional Learning Community (PLC) who is providing leadership to the group throughout its work. The teacher may also provide coaching to team members. Depending on staffing, a lead teacher may provide leadership to more than one study group. However, the lead teacher must retain some classroom responsibilities in order to utilize and demonstrate in his/her own classroom the practices that are being studied.

16. Lead teachers will be assigned based on "demonstrated student achievement improvement in the subgroup/content area". What does that mean and how will it be determined?

Demonstrated student achievement is evidenced by learning gains and improved proficiency on the FCAT. The district should be able to determine this through its appraisal system. However, if the district's appraisal system is not thorough enough to provide that information then other evidence of student achievement must be utilized to make that determination.

17. Is there any definition as to required student contact time for these coaches and lead teachers? Can they be assigned to more than one school?

Coaches must be released full-time and not maintain classroom responsibilities. Lead teachers must maintain classroom responsibilities for a portion of their time. Both lead teachers and coaches should be assigned to a school on a full-time basis.

18. Will schools be provided additional state or federal funds to provide reading and math coaches and lead teachers?

The Reading Allocation and Title II, Part A funds may be used to provide coaches and lead teachers as long as the district is not supplanting.

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19. Can a content area teacher provide reading or math intervention to Level 1 students if they block one class with a content area class be considered highly qualified?

Level 1 students may have a subject specific course (i.e. intensive math); therefore the teacher would have to be highly qualified in that subject.

20. What does the term “qualified” mean for student support personnel?

“Qualified” means that the staff member holds the certificate required in the Course Code Directory for the position.

21. Student support personnel must have documented experience in a similar school setting. What is a “similar school setting”? What if there is no other similar school setting in that school district and the support personnel have only worked in that district?

The district should be looking for someone who has documented success in a school setting that is similar to the one in which they are being placed in order to best serve those students. “Similar” can include grade levels, demographics, urban/rural, etc., including success in improving the achievement of students performing at similar levels, as determined by the district. If the staff person is already successful in that school, there is no need to make a personnel change.

22. What flexibility will be given to districts for the 2008-09 school year on human resources issues such as requiring that there are no teachers in need of improvement at the school?

Priority for implementation in the 2008-09 school year must be given to Intervene, F, and Repeating F schools. For Correct II schools, districts must make every effort to ensure implementation during this school year. In cases of non-compliance, the district must have a comprehensive plan for addressing the requirement.

23. What funding sources can a district utilize to hire reading, math, and science coaches, outside experts, professional partners, human resources staff, and content experts to coach Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and Lesson Study Groups (LSGs)?

Districts may use Title I, Part A, Title I School Improvement, Title II, Part A, the Reading Allocation, Supplemental Academic Instruction funds, or other state and federal funds to meet the requirements of Differentiated Accountability as long as supplanting requirements are met.

Professional Development

1. What resources should a district provide in redesigning the master schedule? Should assistance be provided by district personnel or can purchased services and/or materials suffice?

District personnel could assist administrators who need training in how to develop the schedule in order to set aside appropriate blocks of time for instruction, common

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planning, and professional development. Consultants may need to be hired in cases where the district is not already using the Professional Learning Communities model, and stipends for participants and materials provided to carry out this requirement. The resulting schedule would need to be supported by the district with the necessary resources to execute it.

Curriculum Aligned and Paced

1. Are schools required to implement a state-approved curriculum?

Correct II and Intervene schools are required to implement a state-adopted curriculum aligned with the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. These schools must use state-adopted curricula and ensure that those curricula are aligned with the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards.

2. There are 12 choices listed as “School Reform Models.” Are we limited to these, and if not, what are the criteria for other selections?

No, the list of models is for informational purposes and is not inclusive. If a district would like to utilize other models, it must document the model’s success in improving low-performing schools.

3. In regard to curriculum, do interventions only refer to reading?

No, progress monitoring and interventions apply to all tested content areas. Interventions should be provided in all areas with low performance, not just reading.

4. Are differentiated instruction and/or pull-outs during the school day for additional instruction considered alternative delivery?

Either would constitute alternative delivery. However, if utilizing a pull-out model, disruption to the educational program must be minimized.

Continuous Improvement Model

1. Is the Continuous Improvement Model considered a schoolwide reform model?

Florida's Continuous Improvement Model is a continuous process in which data analysis determines classroom instruction and is one component of a schoolwide reform model. A comprehensive schoolwide reform model focuses on improving the whole school, addressing curriculum, school staff, school management, the community, and parents.

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2. Are districts permitted to use other assessments or must they use a specific assessment for screening and progress monitoring?

It is at the district's discretion which screening and progress monitoring instruments are administered. If screening and progress monitoring methods are in place, new assessments would not need to be administered.

24. Is the use of the RTI (Response to Intervention) process required or just permitted? Will schools be given flexibility to establish models that reflect their school's unique needs?

The basic elements of Rtl are required by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Requirements of Florida's Differentiated Accountability Plan reflects the importance of pursuing schoolwide change, referred to as Rtl, with a higher degree of accountability for schools in the most significant need of assistance. Rtl is a framework that relies on the context of each school. The major components remain consistent, but flexibility in the problem-solving process is inherent. The consistent elements and foundation beliefs are detailed in Florida's State-wide Response to Instruction/Implementation Plan accessible at <http://www.florida-rti.org/>.

25. Is the RTI process targeted at both general classroom teachers and special education personnel?

Rtl is an "every student" schoolwide application. Therefore, both general and special educators' consensus and committed involvement are necessary. Professional development efforts are targeted toward teams with representation from student services, general education, curriculum development for academic areas and behavior support, special education, and administration. In this way, school-based leadership teams are trained in a multidisciplinary format with a focus on the necessary skills of systematic problem-solving, rather than isolated training for groups holding particular titles within the system.

3. Our District has been using ST2. May we substitute this for Response to Instruction/Intervention (Rtl)?

Yes, a district that is using ST2 may substitute that approach for Rtl.

Choice with Transportation

1. The new plan states that SINI 1 – 5+ provide Supplemental Educational Services (SES) with Choice provided for SINI 2 – 5+. Is this to be implemented for 2008-09?

Yes; however, districts will not need to go back and take away Choice that has already been granted for the 2008-09 school year.

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Monitoring Plans and Processes

1. For Intervene schools, what format will school districts use to submit plans?

The Department will provide the format for Intervene conversion plans. Regional Directors will be responsible for updating the Department on the progress of Intervene schools; therefore, monthly reports generated at the school level will not be necessary.

2. Can the School Advisory Councils serve as the monitoring team?

School Advisory Councils are required to monitor implementation of the school improvement plan and may serve on the monitoring team.