Wyoming

Wyoming includes high-achieving students in its growth model and reports their results separately. Its accountability system would be stronger if it rewarded schools that help students achieve at an advanced level.

The Purpose of This Analysis

The Every Student Succeeds Act grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than its predecessor, No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Consequently, states now have an opportunity to design school rating systems that improve upon the NCLB model, especially when it comes to high achievers.

NCLB meant well (as did many state accountability systems that preceded it), but it had a pernicious flaw. Namely, it created strong incentives for schools to focus all their energy on helping low-performing students get over a modest "proficiency" bar, while ignoring the educational needs of their high achievers, who were likely to pass state reading and math tests regardless of what happened in the classroom. This may be why the United States has seen significant achievement growth for its lowest-performing students over the last twenty years but smaller gains for its top students.

Starting in 2011, former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan offered waivers to states that wanted the flexibility to redesign their accountability systems. In particular, states were allowed to incorporate the use of real student growth measures into their school determinations. This was important for a variety of reasons. First, growth measures more accurately evaluate schools' impact on student achievement than proficiency rates, which are strongly correlated with student demographics, family circumstance, and prior achievement. But just as significantly, well-designed growth measures can eliminate the temptation for schools to ignore their high achievers.

ESSA maintains NCLB's requirement that states assess students annually in grades 3–8 and once in high school, as well as the mandate that states adopt accountability systems that lead to ratings for schools. These systems must include four types of indicators: academic achievement; another academic indicator, which can include student growth for elementary and middle schools; growth towards English proficiency for English language learners; and at least one other valid, reliable indicator of school quality or student success. Each of the academic indicators (1–3) must carry "substantial" weight and, in the aggregate, must count "much more" than the fourth.

Here we examine whether Wyoming's accountability system prioritizes high achievers. We specifically evaluate the state's system for rating school performance during the 2014-2015 school year. We do not examine the quality of Wyoming's standards, tests, or sanctions for low performance.

This analysis also illustrates how states can seize the opportunity under ESSA to redesign their accountability systems and prioritize high achievers.

This last point is especially important because many state accountability systems are currently in flux. In part, that's because of recent changes allowed by ESEA waivers, as well as the coming changes driven by ESSA implementation. But it's also because states across the country recently moved to new, tougher assessments linked to their new, tougher standards.

States may think we're being premature in evaluating their systems during this time of massive change. Please understand that our primary objective is to identify the design features of an accountability system that works for all students—which we hope will become the prevailing model now that ESEA is reauthorized and states' testing regimes are becoming stable once again.

Our focus here is on rating systems for elementary and middle schools. A separate analysis will examine the same issues for high school accountability.

How States Can Prioritize High Achievers in their School Accountability Systems

In our view, states can and should take four steps to ensure that the needs of high achievers are prioritized under ESSA:

1. **For the first academic indicator required by ESSA ("academic achievement"), give schools incentives for getting more students to an "advanced" level.** Under ESSA, states will continue to track the percentage of students who attain proficiency on state tests. They should also give schools incentives for getting students to an advanced level (such as level four on Smarter Balanced or level five on PARCC). For example, they might create an achievement index that gives schools partial credit for getting students to "basic," full credit for getting students to "proficient," and additional credit for getting students to "advanced." (It's not entirely clear from the Department of Education's proposed regulations whether this will be allowed, though we don't see anything in the law prohibiting it.)

2. **For the second academic indicator expected by ESSA (student growth), rate schools using a "true growth model," i.e., one that looks at the progress of individual students at all achievement levels and not just those who are low-performing or below the "proficient" line.** Regrettably, some states still don't consider individual student growth, or else they use a "growth-to-proficiency system" that continues to encourage schools to ignore the needs of students above (or far above) the proficient level. Using true growth models—such as "value added" or the "growth percentile method"—for all students is much preferred.

3. **Include "gifted students" (or "high achieving students") as a subgroup in the state's accountability system and report results for them separately.** States can signal that high achievers matter by making them a visible, trackable "subgroup," akin to special education students or English language learners, and publishing school ratings for their progress and/or achievement. (Obviously, it makes little sense to simply report that high achievers are high-achieving. But whether they are making strong growth is quite relevant. Alternatively, states might publish results for students labeled as "gifted," though that opens up a can of worms about how that label is applied.)

4. **When determining summative school ratings, make growth—across the achievement spectrum—count the most.** Finally, the Department of Education's proposed regulations require states to combine multiple factors into summative school ratings, probably through an index. Each of the three academic indicators (achievement, growth, and progress toward English proficiency) must carry "substantial" weight. But in our view, states should (and, under ESSA, are free to) make growth matter the most (50 percent or more of a school's total score). Otherwise, schools will continue to face an incentive to ignore their high-performers. (States that don't combine their indicators into a summative school rating receive a "Not Applicable" here.

DOES WYOMING'S ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM PRIORITIZE HIGH ACHIEVERS?

INDICATOR	RATINGS	NOTES
1. Does the state rate schools' "academic achievement" using a model that gives additional credit for students achieving at an "advanced" level?		Wyoming does not give additional credit for students achieving at an "advanced" level.[1]
2. Does the state rate schools' growth using a model that looks at the progress of all individual students, not just those below the "proficient" line?		Wyoming uses a student growth percentile model.[2] A student growth percentile model compares students to peers with similar achievement in the previous school year by ranking them based on their year-to-year growth.
3. Does the state's accountability system include "gifted students," "high-achieving students," or the like as a subgroup and report their results separately?		Wyoming includes students who are "advanced" in math and/or reading as a subgroup and reports their growth results separately. (See Exhibit A.)
4. When calculating summative school ratings, does "growth for all students" count for at least half of the rating?		"Growth for all students" counts for one-third of a school's summative rating. It is one of three factors used to evaluate schools.[3] (See Exhibits B and C.)

EXHIBIT A[4]

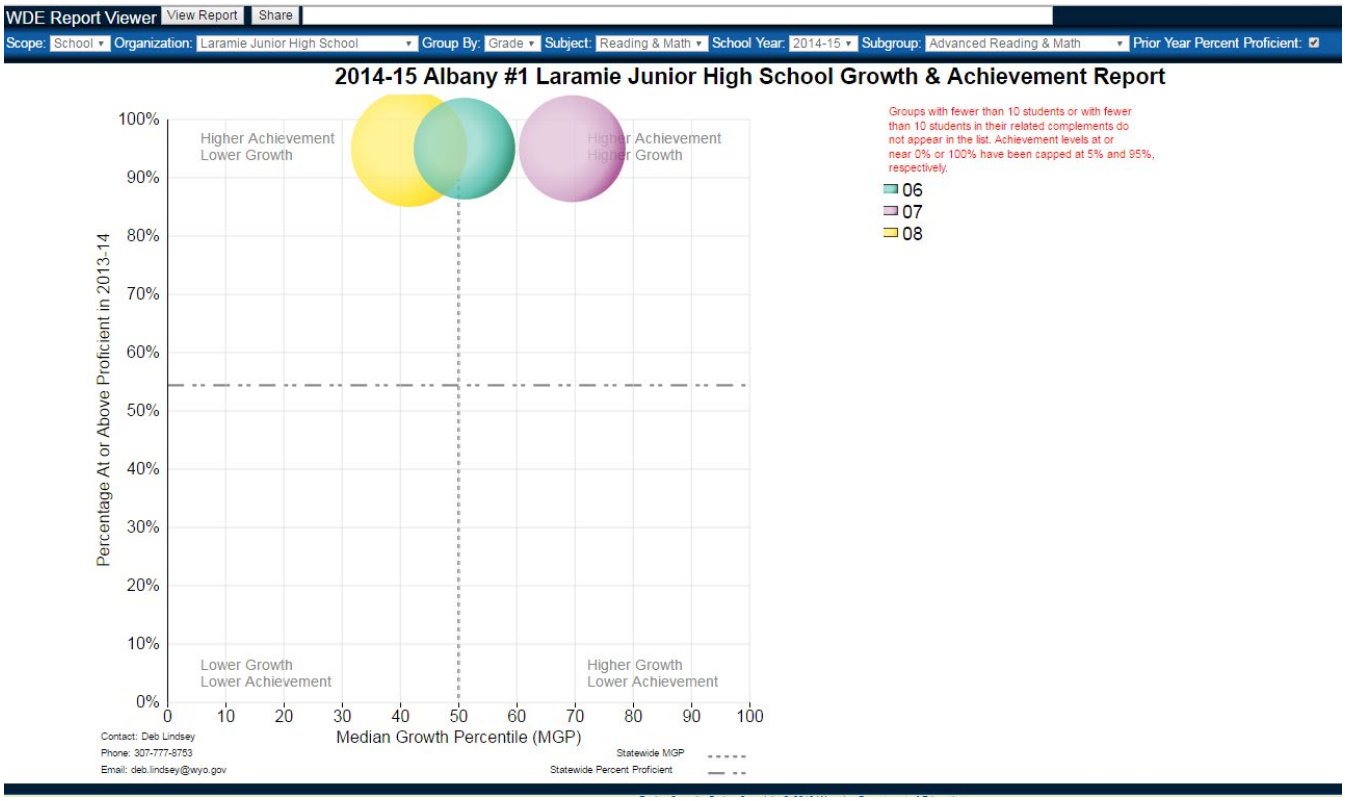
WDE Report Viewer
View Report
Share
Scope: School
Organization: Laramie Junior High School
Group By: Grade
Subject: Reading & Math
School Year: 2014-15
Subgroup: Advanced Reading & Math
Prior Year Percent Proficient:
2014-15 Albany #1 Laramie Junior High School Growth & Achievement Report
Higher Achievement
Lower Growth
Higher Achievement
Higher Growth
Lower Growth
Lower Achievement
Higher Growth
Lower Achievement
Percentage At or Above Proficient in 2013-14
Median Growth Percentile (MGP)
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
0
10
20
30
40
50
60
70
80
90
100
Groups with fewer than 10 students or with fewer than 10 students in their related complements do not appear in the list. Achievement levels at or near 0% or 100% have been capped at 5% and 95%, respectively.
06
07
08
Contact: Deb Lindsey
Phone: 307-777-8753
Email: deb.lindsey@wyo.gov
Statewide MGP
Statewide Percent Proficient

EXHIBIT B[5]

WYOMING
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

2014-15 School Performance Report For Elementary and Middle School Grades

District Name: **Albany #1**

School Name: **Laramie Junior High School**

Grades Served: **6-9**

Enrollment: **858**

MEETING EXPECTATIONS

Schools in Wyoming may fall within one of four performance levels based on their pattern of performance on FOUR indicators: Achievement, Growth, Equity, and Participation Rate.

The FOUR performance levels are:

EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS
MEETING EXPECTATIONS
PARTIALLY MEETING EXPECTATIONS
NOT MEETING EXPECTATIONS

(For a description of the performance levels see the end of this report.)

School Accountability Implementation Handbook

Click this link for contacts and more information about the Wyoming Accountability in Education Act (WAEA).

School Indicator Performance
Only students enrolled at the school for a full academic year were included.
Full Academic Year is October 1st through the midpoint of the state assessment window.

Indicator	Category	Count of Students	Description
Growth	Meeting Targets	537	Growth is a median student growth percentile (MGP) in reading and math combined for all students in grades four through eight as measured by the PAWS.
Equity	Meeting Targets	130	Equity is the median student growth percentile (MGP) in reading and math combined for a subgroup of students who had low reading and math test scores in the prior year.
Achievement	Meeting Targets	593	Achievement is the percent proficient or above on state tests in reading, mathematics, and science.
Participation Rate	Met		The participation rate requirement is 95%. The participation rate threshold is 90%. When a school's participation rate is below the requirement but at or above the threshold, the school is docked one performance level. When a school's participation rate is below the threshold the school is considered not scorable and is assigned to the not meeting expectation performance level.

EXHIBIT C [6]

	Performance Categories and Associated Scores		
	Below Targets	Meeting Targets	Exceeding Targets
Growth	< 45	>= 45 and < 60	>= 60
Equity	< 47	>= 47 and < 60	>= 60
Achievement	< 52	>= 52 and < 69	>= 69

2015 Performance Level Descriptors for Schools with Grades 3-8

Exceeding Expectations
Schools in this category are considered models of performance. These schools typically exceeded target in achievement and at least one other performance indicator - equity or growth – while meeting target on the other indicator.

Meeting Expectations
Schools in this category demonstrated performance that met or exceeded target on multiple performance indicators. All of these schools met or exceeded state targets in achievement. They typically met or exceeded targets on student growth and promotion of equity *or* fell below target on growth or equity while exceeding target on achievement.

Partially Meeting Expectations
Schools in this category typically performed below target on the growth and equity performance indicators *or* were below target in achievement. Many schools in this category met or exceeded state target levels in student growth *and/or* promoting equity for low-achieving students.

Not Meeting Expectations
Schools in this category had unacceptable performance on all indicators. Improvement is an urgent priority for these schools. These schools had below-target levels of achievement and student growth and showed insufficient academic improvement for low-achieving students.

ENDNOTES

1. "2015 Wyoming School Performance Rating Model Implementation Handbook," Wyoming Department of Education, pages 2–3, accessed May 16, 2016, http://edu.wyoming.gov/downloads/accountability/2015/implementation-handbook.pdf.

2. Ibid, 3.

3. Ibid, 5–6.

4. "2014–15 Albany #1 Laramie Junior High School Growth & Achievement Report," Wyoming Department of Education, accessed May 17, 2016, https://portals.edu.wyoming.gov/Reports/Public/growth-and-achievement.

5. "2014–15 School Performance Report For Elementary and Middle School Grades-Laramie Junior High School," Wyoming Department of Education, accessed May 17, 2016, https://portals.edu.wyoming.gov/Reports/Public/wde-reports-2012/public-reports/waea/2015-elem-and-middle-school-performance.

6. Ibid.