



Wyoming Department of Education

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MEMORANDUM NO. 2008 - 040

TO: School District Superintendents
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FROM: Dr. Jim McBride
Wyoming Superintendent of Public Instruction

DATE: March 14, 2008

SUBJECT: Growth Models

Information to Share

Over the past months, the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) has researched growth modeling as an accountability option. We have closely monitored the U.S. Department of Education's (USDE) guidance on this topic as well as growth model piloting in nine states (AK, AR, AZ, DE, FL IA, OH, NC, TN) where growth modeling is currently being allowed by USDE for part of the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) determination process. The purpose of this memorandum is to inform you of some of our findings and the current WDE stance on this issue.

First, it's important to realize that in the above pilot states, growth models truly serve as an adjunct to traditional AYP status models, not as a replacement. No state has been cleared by USDE to abandon traditional AYP determination models—that is, Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) targets and Safe Harbor provisions as employed here in Wyoming, in lieu of a growth model or solely by growth calculations. Instead, growth models in these states mostly represent a third layer or tier in their AYP analysis procedures (i.e., after comparisons to AMO targets, and then after “second looks” as provided under Safe Harbor). While a reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) might change current conditions for how growth models are deployed in states, it's important to understand that growth models, at least as currently sanctioned by the USDE, do not represent a one-to-one substitute to traditional AYP models and procedures.

Secondly, WDE continues to review the track record of growth models in helping schools meet AYP in the piloting states. These states are not required to publicly report or break out the number of schools meeting AYP solely through growth calculations; therefore, the reported impact data are limited. The information we have obtained suggests growth models have had minimal or little impact in helping schools meet AYP. In most cases, less than one percent of all schools in a given state or school year were able to achieve AYP through growth modeling after their AMO

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status determinations were made and Safe Harbor provisions exhausted. These growth model statistics are in states where roughly one-quarter to two-thirds of public schools did not achieve AYP in school year 2005-2006 or school year 2006-2007; situations far different than here in Wyoming where over 90% of our schools met their school year 2006-2007 AYP objectives.

Third, a stabilized state assessment process is a critical prerequisite to implementing a growth model for any state. In other words, multiple years of consistent test administrations (e.g., same number and timing of testing windows, consistent test delivery modes, etc.) are needed to establish stable scores for students and their schools/districts. This is a critical element in reliably measuring changes of individual student scores and calculating growth. Two consistent years is considered a bare minimum, while three years provide greater stability in modeling growth (measuring each student's gain score between years one and two, and then again between years two and three). While we continue to make significant enhancements to improve PAWS and how it is delivered, further changes to the system also defer a practical starting point for empirically testing what types of growth calculations will work best for Wyoming students and schools; and in turn, what makes the best sense for Wyoming in terms of proposing a growth modeling plan to the USDE.

All states sanctioned by USDE for growth modeling in their AYP determinations have received full or expected approvals on their assessment systems. Wyoming's general assessment, PAWS, has received full approval. Wyoming's alternate assessment, PAWS-ALT, has undergone a redesign and will go through a federal review following the 2008 administration.

In short, Wyoming is perhaps two to three years away from having the ability to bring a growth model proposal before the USDE. Please keep in mind that over 90% of our schools achieved AYP last year by meeting the existing AMO targets and/or via Safe Harbor gains without a growth model in Wyoming.

However, as all are aware, Wyoming's statewide AMO targets increase for this year's AYP determinations, and will do so again in future years as we approach 100% proficiency for all students by 2014. Therefore, growth modeling is certainly not a moot issue but rather an important strategic one. In addition, the future reauthorization of No Child Left Behind could change the landscape of growth modeling as an accountability topic, perhaps dramatically so, and affect how growth proposals might meet USDE approval and oversight. Thus, WDE will continue to monitor this strategic topic closely, and keep you apprised of developments or shifts at the federal or state level.

The WDE review of growth model options will continue. In the fall of 2008, we will report to the Joint Education Committee on the possibility of Wyoming using a growth model to comply with the requirements of No Child Left Behind. We will keep you posted on any changes and/or updates.