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Almost Half of U.S. Schools Did Not Make Adequate Yearly Progress in 2011, CEP Report Finds

Six-Year Trends for 50 States and D.C. Show Record Numbers of Schools Falling Short

WASHINGTON, D.C. – December 15, 2011 – An estimated 48 percent of U.S. public schools failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2011, according to a new report by the Center on Education Policy. Nationwide, this marks an increase from the 39 percent of schools that did not make AYP in 2010 and is the highest percentage since NCLB took effect in 2002.

NCLB requires states to set yearly targets for the percentage of students scoring proficient on state tests and for other performance indicators, culminating in the NCLB goal of 100 percent of students scoring proficient by 2014. States annually determine whether schools have made adequate yearly progress toward these targets based on tests administered during the previous school year. Schools that fail to make AYP for two consecutive years or more must undergo a series of NCLB-mandated interventions intended to improve student achievement.

In 35 states, the percentage of schools not making AYP reached a six-year high, according to CEP's analysis of trends from 2006 through 2011 for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. In 24 states and D.C., half or more of the public schools did not make AYP – a leap from just 12 such states in 2010. And in five states (Florida, Missouri, New Mexico, Massachusetts and South Carolina) and D.C., three-quarters or more of schools did not make AYP.

The 2011 figures are estimates based on what states have reported to date, the report notes; the official numbers of schools not making AYP will not be released until next year.

"The fact that half of American schools are considered failing under NCLB shows how crudely the law measures the quality of a school," said Jack Jennings, CEP's president and CEO. "NCLB needs to be changed, and since Congress is hamstrung, the Obama administration is right to move ahead with waivers of NCLB provisions."

In September of this year, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced the Administration's decision to allow states to apply for unprecedented flexibility from some of the most important aspects of NCLB through a waiver process. "With so many schools not making AYP in some states and with Congress lagging in reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, it's not surprising that Secretary Duncan would consider offering waivers from the AYP requirements and the 2014 deadline," said Alexandra Usher, CEP research assistant and author of the report.

While the percentage of schools not making AYP has increased nationally, the CEP analysis found wide variation across states in 2011, ranging from about 11 percent of schools not making in Wisconsin to about 89 percent in Florida. These variations may be due in large part to differences in states' tests, demographics, proficiency targets, and other factors, the report cautions, and make it inappropriate to compare AYP results across states. In addition, results can vary from year to year even in the same state, especially if the state's proficiency targets have recently increased, as they are required to do periodically under NCLB. "States with a high percentage of schools failing to make AYP should not automatically be considered to have weak educational systems—they may have harder tests or higher proficiency targets," explained Usher.

The report, *AYP Results for 2010-11*, is available for free at www.cep-dc.org.

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Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in January 1995 by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy is a national, independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. The Center does not represent any special interests.