

## **Definitions of Priority, Focus, and Reward Schools**

### **Priority Schools**

A Priority school is a school that has been identified as among the lowest-performing five percent of Title I schools in the state over the past three years, or any non-Title I school that would otherwise have met the same criteria. There are 75 Priority Schools. The types of Priority Schools are—

- Lowest-Performing: schools with the lowest school-wide proficiency rates in the state. Priority schools in this category have an overall three-year proficiency rate of 31.6% or lower.
- SIG school: schools that are part of the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program

### **Focus Schools**

A Focus School is a school that has room for improvement in areas that are specific to the school. As part of the process, Focus Schools will receive targeted and tailored solutions to meet the school's unique needs. There are 183 Focus schools. The types of Focus schools are—

- Low Graduation Rates: High schools with a 2011 graduation rate lower than 75%.
- Largest Within-School Gaps: schools with the largest in-school proficiency gap between the highest-performing subgroup and the combined proficiency of the two lowest-performing subgroups. Schools in this category have a proficiency gap between these subgroups of 43.5 percentage points or higher.
- Lowest Subgroup Performance: schools whose two lowest-performing subgroups rank among the lowest combined proficiency rates in the state. Schools in this category have an overall proficiency rate for these lowest-performing subgroups of 29.2% or lower.

### **Reward Schools**

A Reward School is a school with outstanding student achievement or growth over the past three years. There are 112 Reward Schools. The types of Reward Schools are—

- Highest-Performing: schools that are the highest-performing in the state, in terms of school-wide proficiency, subgroup proficiency, and graduation rates.
- Highest-Progress: schools that have high levels of student growth, measured using their median Student Growth Percentiles (SGP) over time.

## **Data Used**

### **State Assessments**

The proficiency rates used to determine priority, focus, and reward schools are based on 3-year averages of state assessments data, from the 2008-09, 2009-10, and 2010-11 school years.

### ***Proficiency Rate Inclusion Criteria:***

These averages consider the performance of every tested student, based on the NJASK, HSPA, and APA. Students coded as in-school for less than 1 year are still included in relevant proficiency rates. When a student has both an APA level and NJASK/HSPA scaled score, we rely exclusively on his/her scaled score.

*Combining Subject Proficiencies:*

Based on this assessment data, we compute each school's Math and LAL proficiency rate, and then generate an average proficiency by weighting each subject's proficiency rate by its number of valid scores. We apply the same method to compute an overall proficiency rate for all subgroups in a school.

*Separating NJASK and HSPA Performance:*

Some schools test both in NJASK and HSPA. The proficiency rates for such schools are separated by the testing program and considered individually. For instance, suppose a school would be a priority school based on its NJASK performance, but not when also factoring in its HSPA results. That school would *still* be designated a priority school because a low proficiency rate in any testing program will trigger the designation of priority and focus. Likewise, large within-school gaps or low subgroup performance based on either NJASK or HSPA can result in a school being designated as 'focus.'

Graduation Rates

We use the State's 2011 4-year cohort-adjusted graduation rate.

Student Growth Over Time

The lists of Priority, Focus, and Reward Schools take into account that some schools exhibit very high levels of student growth. For elementary/middle schools, we determine high growth based on each school's/subgroup's median Student Growth Percentile over the past three years of assessments. For high schools, we determine high growth based on school-wide HSPA proficiency changes over time. Median growth scores, whether for schools or subgroups within schools, must be based on at least 80 growth percentiles over the three years of assessments to be used.

**Priority Schools Methodology**

Priority Schools are the 75 schools in the state that have shown the lowest academic performance and lack of improvement over a number of years.

*Determining the Priority Schools Based on SIG Participation*

The State has identified all 19 schools that receive Tier 1 or Tier 2 SIG funding as priority schools.

*Determining the Priority Schools Based on Low School-wide Proficiency*

The State computes each school's overall proficiency, based on the method and data described above. Any school with an overall proficiency rate of roughly 31.6% or lower is classified as a priority school because of low school-wide proficiency.

*Incorporating Growth in Priority Schools*

The State recognizes that some schools have improved student learning at high levels over a number of years. Schools that had median SGPs (based on the 2008-09, 2009-10, and 2010-11 assessments) of 65 or higher were ineligible for priority status. Because high schools do not receive SGP scores, any high school with an average yearly proficiency increase of 5 or more percentage points was ineligible for priority status.

**Focus Schools Methodology**

Focus Schools contribute to the State's achievement gap by having deficiencies in the academic performance of student subgroups over a number of years. These schools may have 1) several subgroups with very low performance compared to subgroups in other schools, 2) a large within-school gap between high-performing and lower-performing subgroups, or 3) low performance at the high school level, as evidenced by low high school graduation rates.

#### *Subgroup Inclusion Criteria*

The State has set a number of criteria to ensure that the subgroups that qualify a school for focus status are a meaningful part of the school's student body. Specifically, over the three years of assessments described above, eligible subgroups must have at least 90 test-eligible students and be at least 5% of test-eligible enrollment in a school. Note that subgroup inclusion determinations are based on the number of test-eligible students, not the number of valid scores.

#### *Combining Subgroup Proficiencies Together*

To avoid a single subgroup from disproportionately affecting the results, the State forms an average of the proficiencies of each school's two lowest-performing subgroups. Subgroup proficiencies are combined using the number of valid scores in each subject, not the number of test-eligible students. For instance, if a school's two-lowest subgroups are SpEd and White, the combined proficiency rate is the average of the SpEd LAL, SpEd Math, White LAL, and White Math proficiencies, weighted by their respective number of valid scores over the 3-year testing period being considered.

#### *Incorporating Growth in Focus Schools*

Subgroups that had median SGPs (based on the 2008-09, 2009-10, and 2010-11 assessments) of 65 or higher were excluded from being designated as the 'lowest' or 'second-lowest' subgroup. In these cases, the next-highest performing subgroup would be considered the 'lowest' or 'second-lowest' subgroup.

#### *Determining the Focus Schools based on Low Subgroup Performance*

Once each school's two lowest-performing eligible subgroups have been identified, the State ranks their combined proficiency as compared to the combined proficiency of other schools' two lowest subgroups. Schools whose two lowest-performing subgroups have an overall proficiency rate of 29.22% or lower were classified as Focus Schools with Low Subgroup Performance. Schools with only one eligible subgroup were not eligible for this classification.

#### *Determining the Focus Schools based on Large Within-School Gaps*

In addition to computing the proficiency of each school's two lowest-performing subgroups, the State identifies the highest-performing subgroup in each school. The State then calculates each school's within-school proficiency gap between this highest-performing subgroup and the combined proficiency of the two lowest-performing subgroups. Schools with a proficiency gap of 43.47 percentage points or higher were classified as Focus Schools with Large Within-School Gaps. Schools with just one or two eligible subgroups were not eligible for this classification. Note that a school's overall proficiency rate is eligible to be the highest-performing subgroup.

#### *Determining the Focus Schools based on Low Graduation Rates*

Any school with a 2011 cohort-adjusted graduation rate of 75% or lower was classified as a Focus School with Low Graduation Rate.

### **Reward Schools Methodology**

Reward schools are schools that the State commends for high academic performance or high levels of student growth over a number of years.

#### *Determining the Reward Schools based on High Performance*

The State recognizes schools that have achieved high levels of student performance—both in the aggregate and in each eligible student subgroup—over a number of years. We rank each school’s individual subgroup proficiencies against those of other schools in the state. Schools in which 1) each eligible subgroup ranks in the top 10% of that subgroup’s performance across the state, 2) the overall proficiency rate is greater than 90%, or at the high school level, 95%, and 3) the overall graduation rate (where applicable) is greater than 90% are classified as Reward Schools With High Student Performance.

#### *Determining the Reward Schools based on High Student Progress*

The State recognizes schools that have grown student achievement at high levels over a number of years. Specifically, schools with a median Student Growth Percentile of 65 or higher, based on the 2008-09, 2009-2010, and 2010-11 assessments, are classified as Reward Schools With High Student Progress.

### **Other Notes**

#### *Determining the Classification When Schools Qualify for Multiple Categories*

There are some schools that qualify for multiple categories. For instance, a school may be eligible for priority status based on its low overall performance, but also qualify for focus status because of low graduation rates or subgroup performance. When schools qualify for multiple categories, the State prioritizes the following classifications: 1) priority status based on SIG participation, 2) priority status based on low schoolwide proficiency, 3) focus status based on low graduation rates, 4) focus status based on low subgroup performance, 5) focus status based on large within-school gaps, 6) reward status based on high student performance, 7) reward status based on high student growth.

#### *How Proficiency Cutoffs Were Set*

The proficiency thresholds described above were set to obtain specific numbers of Title I priority and focus schools. As per ESEA Flexibility terms, the State must identify 72 Title I Priority schools and 144 Title I Focus Schools. The State rank-ordered Title I schools to determine which would be assigned priority or focus status. We then classified non-Title I schools as priority or focus if they would otherwise have met the relevant criteria. Thus, schools should not expect the proficiency rate cutoffs to remain constant in future designations of priority, focus, and reward schools. Instead, these cutoffs will change based on the composition of the Title I schools that are deemed eligible.