

AN AUTUMNAL MESSAGE: LET FLY THE AYP PIGEONS!¹

Fall is here. It is a time for footballs to fly, pumpkins to ripen, and school administrators to ponder their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) reports. I assume you've received your own AYP reports by this time. That's because the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires districts to receive their state-issued AYP reports early enough so district administrators can, in turn, inform students' parents of each school's AYP status, thereby giving parents the time to transfer their children from AYP-losing schools to AYP-winning schools. Although it would seem to be "a violation of federal law" for districts to receive their annual AYP reports belatedly, we continue to hear of states in which tardiness by state personnel or mistakes by a state's test contractor have dramatically delayed the distribution of AYP reports to districts.

I recently spoke with a state assessment director who suggested, whimsically I suspect, that next year he would consider sending out each district's AYP reports via carrier pigeons. Then, if delays occurred, such tardiness would not be blamed on the state or on the *state-selected* test contractor. Instead, lateness in AYP reports could be attributed to Mother Nature and/or stiff headwinds.

However, if your local AYP results have now landed in or near your lap, I plead with you to interpret those reports only after answering the following question: "*Are our state's NCLB tests instructionally sensitive?*" You see, if you fail to pose that query before hopping into your test-interpretive uniform, odds are you'll make some monster misinterpretations when analyzing your local AYP results.

Most states' NCLB tests are, sadly, essentially insensitive to instruction, that is, those tests are unable to detect the impact of improved instruction in a school or district even if such improvement is unarguably present. The chief cause for such instructional insensitivity stems directly from the test-construction procedures employed to create almost all NCLB tests. Those procedures turn out to make scores on NCLB tests more directly related to students' socioeconomic status than to how well those students have been taught. Instructionally insensitive NCLB tests simply can't distinguish between effective and ineffective instruction. Yet, the fundamental purpose of each year's AYP determinations is to help school leaders identify instruction that's weak and instruction that's strong. Indeed, the underlying premise of NCLB is that, over time, instruction will get better and, as a consequence, students' test performances will rise concomitantly. Instructionally insensitive NCLB tests, sadly, make most implementations of this federal law almost inane.

¹ This essay appeared originally in *The DA Pulse*, an online publication, as a message to district school administrators.

If your state's NCLB tests are instructionally *sensitive*, you can ascribe genuine meaning to your AYP reports. If your state's tests are instructionally *insensitive*, however, then don't squander your interpretive skills. Those AYP results will have little relevance to the quality of schooling.

Whether your AYP reports arrive in the mail as hard copies, through the ether as electronic missives, or strapped to the leg of a feathered friend, don't spend one minute messing with those reports until you're convinced your state's NCLB tests truly are instructionally sensitive. Otherwise, you're just wasting your time.

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