

## **Summary of Testimony: Options for Improving NCLB's Measures of Progress**

By Chrys Dougherty, Ph.D., Director of Research, National Center for Educational Accountability  
to the Committee on Education and Labor, U.S. House of Representatives, March 21, 2007

- Growth models look at the academic growth or progress of individual students over time. The central growth model question is: Is this student growing fast enough to reach the desired goal?
- Annual testing in grades 3-8 has also been crucial for the development of growth models. These models are based on following students year after year and looking at individual growth every year, rather than waiting several years to find out whether the student has progressed.<sup>1</sup>
- Since the desired goal under NCLB is proficiency, the first question that NCLB growth models address is whether non-proficient students are growing fast enough to reach proficiency in the near future – usually in the next three years. These models sometimes address a second question: whether already proficient students are growing fast enough to stay proficient.
- A third question which growth models should address – especially important in states where the proficiency standard is low – is whether already proficient students are growing to levels higher than proficiency. NCLB as currently written does not encourage states and school districts to address this question.<sup>2</sup> We would like to encourage school systems to focus on whether students, *particularly disadvantaged students*, are growing toward readiness for college and skilled careers after high school. This is probably best accomplished by encouraging the creation of voluntary recognition, best practice research, and incentive programs for schools that are higher performing on growth across all student populations.<sup>3</sup>
- To create a growth model, states need the following three elements from the list of Ten Essential Elements for a statewide longitudinal student data system identified by the Data Quality Campaign ([www.dataqualitycampaign.org](http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org)):
  - Element One: A statewide student identifier making it possible to follow the same students over time
  - Element Three: The ability to link students' test score records over time
  - Element Four: Information on untested students and the reasons why they were not tested.

According to the 2006 NCEA Survey on State Longitudinal Data Systems, 27 states will have the capability of doing a growth model as of the 2007-08 school year.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The ability to look at student growth was a major motivator for the early adoption of grades 3-8 testing in states such as Tennessee, Texas and North Carolina. Annual testing data was critical for Texas's Comparable Improvement growth model, North Carolina's growth model, and Tennessee's value-added model.

<sup>2</sup> The exception to this is NCLB's authorization of funding for Advanced Placement incentive programs.

<sup>3</sup> See [www.just4kids.org](http://www.just4kids.org) for examples of recognition and best practices studies of higher performing schools.

<sup>4</sup> The list of 27 states may be found at [www.dataqualitycampaign.org/survey\\_results/policy.cfm](http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/survey_results/policy.cfm). The Statewide Longitudinal Data System grants have helped many states develop and/or improve their longitudinal student data capabilities.