

- Addressing our lowest performing schools – An overview

What's the difference voluntary action and required action? Through the 2009-2010 school year, schools identified as persistently low achieving (the bottom five percent of all schools) can volunteer to participate in the federal school improvement program. Schools that volunteer for school improvement must use one of [four federal models](#) (transformation, turnaround, restart, closure) in order to receive funding (potential). Pending legislation, persistently low achieving schools will be required to take action to improve student learning in 2011 (assuming they are not already operating in a system of voluntary action).

Isn't this about takeover? No. This program is about empowering local districts to make significant changes with the aid of federal (and potentially) state funds. The plan for action is created by the local district. The state will ensure that the plan fits within the framework of acceptable reform measures (as determined by both the state and the U.S. Department of Education).

Doesn't this program unfairly target poor schools? Schools are identified based on reading and math assessment scores. Though there are correlations between poverty and performance, a school's free/reduced lunch levels are not considered in the equation.

I've heard AYP is punitive. How is this program different? The purpose of the statewide accountability system is to provide the resources and direction schools need to make lasting improvements in student achievement. Working together with the state, schools in need will receive more funding to implement programs that they feel will dramatically improve student performance.

What is the difference between an education gap and an achievement gap? An achievement gap reflects a significant performance difference between student groups. An education gap reflects the capacity difference that exists between schools when comparing their ability to provide an excellent education for all students. The required action process is designed to close both the education gap, which in turn should help close the achievement gap.

What does Required Action entail? If SB 6696 passes, Required Action Districts will receive extra school improvement funds from the state, designed to support the following steps:

1. A team of external experts will conduct an audit of the school, identifying areas in need of improvement.
2. The district will work with its teachers, parents, students, and community to devise a plan to turn around its struggling schools. The plan must address the findings of the audit and must follow [one of four federal models for school improvement](#). These models will provide schools with more flexibility for hiring, hours, and operations. If necessary, the district and its labor unions will reopen collective bargaining agreements to address issues raised in the academic performance audit.
3. The district must submit its plan to SBE for approval. The district also has the capacity to appeal SBE's ruling to a Required Action Review Panel composed of five individuals appointed by the Legislature and the Governor.
4. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) will provide SBE with reports of the districts' progress.
5. OSPI will report back to SBE whether a district is eligible to leave Required Action status after three years of its turnaround implementation.

Required Action: *A state system ensuring all students in Washington have the opportunity to receive an exemplary education.*

For additional information and Board meeting materials, go to: www.sbe.wa.gov
or call the Board office at: 360-725-6025.