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State sets reading, math goals based on race, ethnicity

By [Leslie Postal](#), Orlando Sentinel

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Florida is setting different goals for reading improvements among its students – based on race and ethnicity. By 2018, 90 percent of Asian students, 88 percent of white students, 81 percent of Hispanic students, and 74 percent of black students are to be reading on grade level.

Florida wants all its public school students to make significant improvements in reading and math during the next six years, but its new standards set higher goals for some students based on their race.

The new targets approved by the State Board of Education on Tuesday set loftier benchmarks for Asian and white youngsters and lower ones for black and Hispanic children.

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Before their vote, some board members questioned the new targets, required under the waiver Florida sought from the federal No Child Left Behind law.

"As a matter of philosophy ... I think we should have the same goal for all categories of our citizenry," said board member John Padget. "Are we happy with the signal that this sends?"

Board member Roberto Martinez added, ""Should an Asian child and an Hispanic child be held to the same standard down the road? The answer is, yes."

Similar race-based achievement targets sparked controversy in Virginia and Washington, D.C., this summer, with critics calling them a way to legalize low expectations for some students.

Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush said such systems would send a "devastating message" that black and Hispanic youngsters weren't as capable as others.

Florida officials, however, said the targets are not meant to set lower expectations for some kids but to acknowledge current performance and outline a path for improvement. The board approved them after agreeing that an explanation for the race-based numbers be included with the new targets.

The U.S Department of Education required targets that would, within six years, cut in half the percentage of students in each "subgroup" performing poorly on reading and math tests, said Jane Fletcher, a deputy commissioner at Florida Department of Education.

Groups now behind are expected to improve at a faster pace. The percentage of black students at grade level in reading is now 38 percent, compared with 57 percent for the state. Black youngsters are to improve 36 percentage points in reading by 2018, compared with a 25 percentage-point gain for the state.

The targets list reading and math goals by race and also for youngsters with disabilities, children still learning English and kids who live in low-income families.

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