

Every Student Succeeds Act Primer: Accountability



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Under the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), states are accountable for focusing resources on low-performing schools and traditionally underserved students who consistently demonstrate low academic performance.

State Goals

ESSA requires states to establish long-term goals for, at minimum, student achievement, high school graduation rates, and English language proficiency with measurements of interim progress. These goals must take into account the school improvement necessary for identifying and closing achievement gaps between groups of students. States must submit their consolidated state plans to the U.S. Department of Education (ED) by April 3, 2017, or September 18, 2017.

Multiple-Measure Accountability Systems

States also must establish multiple-measure accountability systems that include the following five distinct indicators:

1. achievement on annual reading/language arts and mathematics assessments and, at the state's discretion, for high schools student growth based on annual assessments in addition to students' annual assessment scores;¹
2. English language proficiency;
3. for elementary and middle schools, a "measure of student growth" or other academic indicator that allows for meaningful differentiation in student performance;

4. for high schools, graduation rates; and
5. at least one indicator of school quality or student success that allows for meaningful differentiation among student performance.

As required by ESSA, the first four indicators of academic achievement must each carry "substantial weight" and collectively carry "much greater weight" than the indicator(s) of school quality or student success (sometimes referred to as the fifth indicator.)

Accountability Indicators

In their statewide accountability systems, states must use each of these indicators to measure the performance of all students collectively and for each subgroup of students separately in every school. For each indicator, states must include at least three distinct and discrete levels of school performance and provide information on a school's level of performance on each indicator, as stipulated by the [final regulation](#) for accountability released by ED.

A state must base its academic achievement indicator for schools on the percentage of students who achieve proficiency on the state's annual reading/language arts and mathematics assessments. States also may choose to incorporate the percentage of students who score above or below the proficient level on state assessments into the academic achievement indicator for schools. However, student performance above proficiency may not fully compensate for student performance below proficiency.

In selecting the indicator(s) for measuring school quality or student success, states must demonstrate that the chosen

indicator(s) are supported by research showing that improvement on the selected measure(s) likely will increase student learning. The indicator(s) also must be valid, reliable, comparable across all districts in the state, used statewide, disaggregated by each student subgroup, and able to differentiate schools.

Single Summative Determination

Each year, states must evaluate and measure the performance of all students and each subgroup of students in a school in a way that results in a single summative determination from among at least three state-defined and understandable categories, as outlined by the [final accountability regulation](#) released by ED. This requirement aims to make accountability systems clear and transparent for parents and the public. However, states are not required to use an A–F or other rating system. They can comply with this requirement simply by using the categories of schools required under the law—identifying schools for comprehensive intervention, identifying schools for targeted intervention, or designating them as other schools.

In an effort to promote greater transparency for the performance of student subgroups, the federal regulations stipulate that a school with a consistently low-performing subgroup of students must receive a lower summative determination than it would if it did not have a consistently low-performing student subgroup.

Comprehensive Support and Improvement Schools

Schools are identified for comprehensive support and improvement based on the performance of all students. At least once every three years, states must identify the lowest-performing 5 percent of Title I schools and high schools with graduation rates at or below 67 percent for comprehensive, locally-determined, evidence-based intervention. These schools have up to four years to meet state-set criteria that would allow them to exit the comprehensive support and improvement status. If the schools do not meet these criteria, they must implement more rigorous state-determined interventions. In addition, districts may allow students in these schools to transfer to other public schools in the district. States must identify schools for comprehensive support and improvement beginning with School Year (SY) 2018–19, as

outlined by the [final regulation](#) for accountability released by ED.

Targeted Support and Improvement Schools

Schools are identified for targeted support and improvement based on the performance of student subgroups. Annually, states must identify any school with any student subgroup that is consistently underperforming based on all indicators in the state accountability system. The [final accountability regulation](#) released by ED clarifies that a student subgroup does not have to fail on multiple indicators to qualify as consistently underperforming.

The schools identified as having a consistently underperforming subgroup must receive targeted, locally-determined, evidence-based intervention. If implementation of targeted interventions is unsuccessful in improving student outcomes based on the indicators in the state accountability system, additional action may be taken after a number of years to be determined by the district. States must identify schools for targeted support and improvement beginning with SY 2019–20, as stipulated by the [final regulation](#) for accountability released by ED.

N-Size and Subgroup Accountability

Under ESSA, states set the minimum number of students needed to trigger the law's accountability and reporting requirements, a number known as "n-size." Setting a low n-size is key in identifying achievement gaps that still exist for traditionally underserved students, including students of color, students from low-income families, English learners, and students with disabilities. (For more information about n-size, see the Alliance for Excellent Education report *Ensuring Equity in ESSA: The Role of N-Size in Subgroup Accountability*.) The [final accountability regulation](#) released by ED does not specify what a state's n-size must be for accountability purposes, but the regulation requires that any state proposing an n-size larger than 30 students must justify its n-size in its state plan.

For additional fact sheets and videos about ESSA, visit www.all4ed.org/essa/

Endnotes

¹ This indicator must include the performance of at least 95 percent of all students and 95 percent of students in each subgroup.