



Federal Assessment and Accountability Requirements

In December 2015, Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), returning power back to the states for the creation of their education accountability systems. ESSA replaced the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002. It requires states to develop new plans demonstrating how they would identify and support their schools, but it gives states significant flexibility in the creation of those plans and their accountability systems. ESSA also eliminated the federal mandate of requiring states to have a teacher evaluation system, although states could choose to continue or refine their teacher evaluation systems if they wanted. Although ESSA shifted authority over most education policy decisions from federal to state, it preserved requirements for various features to be present in each state's accountability system, which are outlined below.

Collecting comprehensive data

Despite giving states more control, ESSA requires certain features to be present in each state's accountability system. It requires each state to have a minimum of four indicators for elementary, middle and high school. For all schools, the state must include indicators for student proficiency on state tests in math and reading, English language proficiency, and at least one indicator of school quality or student success (such as proficiency on other tests, chronic absenteeism, or college and career readiness). Elementary and middle schools are required to include another statewide academic indicator that could be broken out by subgroup, and high schools must include four-year graduation rates. Additionally, each state's accountability system needs to include long-term goals, such as the percentage of growth in third-grade reading for African American students, measured by annual indicators. States are required to report annually on the progress made in each of their schools.

Standards and testing

ESSA requires that states adopt challenging academic standards in reading, math and science and demonstrate that they are aligned with college entrance requirements. States are required to assess students annually in math and reading in grades 3-8 and once in grades 9-12. They also have to assess students annually in science at least once in grades 3-5, 6-9 and 10-12. States are required to have a 95% participation rate for each school and each student group, although they have discretion over how to address schools that did not meet this benchmark for participation. Additionally, states are permitted to administer an alternate assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, which could not exceed 1% of the assessed student population.

States may allow districts to use a nationally recognized high school test in place of the statewide test; however, if a district chose to utilize this flexibility, it must use the same test in all of its high schools, consult with stakeholders and notify parents. To be considered "nationally recognized," the test had to be given in multiple states, be recognized by institutions of higher education for the purposes of entrance or placement into courses in postsecondary education or training



programs and provide the same benefits to all students, including English language learners (ELL) and students with disabilities.

ESSA also includes various requirements to support ELL and Native American students. States must administer a single statewide English language proficiency assessment to all ELL students in grades K-12. Consistent with the requirement that states must make every effort to make native language assessments available for all languages present “to a significant extent” in a state, the regulations require that states define what it means for a language to be present “to a significant extent,” including that the most common language (besides English) is included in that definition. The regulations permit states to administer assessments in a Native American language to students enrolled in a Native American language school or program in any subject until the students are in high school, regardless of whether the students are identified as English learners.

Identifying low-performing schools

ESSA includes requirements for identifying low-performing schools. Based on the data collected, states must identify at least five percent of their lowest-performing Title I schools and high schools that failed to graduate one-third or more of their students once every three school years. They are required to annually identify schools for which a subgroup of students are consistently underperforming over a period of time, as determined by the state, as needing comprehensive support. States also have to annually identify any school with a portion of its students that are consistently underperforming, based on all the indicators in the state accountability system, as needing targeted intervention and support. Once identified, states and districts must work with the low-performing schools to determine the appropriate interventions to support student outcomes.

Public Reporting

Additionally, ESSA requires states and districts to publicly share the information they collected about student and school performance. States are required to annually publish a statewide report card. Districts were also required to publish a districtwide report card including information about the district as a whole and for each school in that district. The report cards must include disaggregated results on all accountability indicators and assessment participation rates; details of the state accountability system, such as the schools identified for comprehensive and targeted support; the professional qualifications of educators; federal, state and local per-pupil expenditures; statistics on students with significant cognitive disabilities taking the alternate assessment; and disaggregated information on which high school graduates enroll in higher education. Additionally, the state report card must include results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, compared with national averages. States and districts are required to annually post the report cards from the preceding year on their websites.



Resources

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