



*A Union of Professionals*

# Leveraging the Every Student Succeeds Act to Move Toward New Accountability

## The Context

For too long, our public schools have been subject to a test-and-punish accountability system that not only has impeded learning but also has led to unintended consequences. Our current dysfunctional accountability system discourages educational innovation, demoralizes teachers, narrows instruction and, most important, fails to address the needs of children, particularly the most disadvantaged. The passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act provides an opportunity for us to replace this faulty system with a new paradigm for accountability, one that supports higher and deeper levels of learning for all students.

## The Solution: A Framework for a New Accountability

We must replace the old test-and-punish model with an accountability framework that builds the capacity of educators and schools to improve student knowledge and skills. A capacity-building accountability system should be designed for enhancing student outcomes rather than for assigning blame. It not only requires better measures of academic performance and broader evidence of student mastery, but also the careful analysis of critical input data to ensure that students, teachers and schools have the resources necessary to promote the desired goals of schooling—academic excellence, civic responsibility and individual development. A new accountability system should rest on three pillars:

### Meaningful learning goals

When meaningful learning for all students is the focus of an accountability system, the system uses measures that encourage and reflect such learning—and uses those measures in ways that improve, rather than limit, educational opportunities for students. This means we need much better assessments of learning that authentically represent the skills and abilities we want students to develop.

### Professional capacity and accountability

Also crucial are professional standards of practice that guide how educators are prepared and how they teach and support students. Accountability for implementing professional practice rests not only with individual educators but also with schools, districts and state agencies that recruit, train, hire, assign, support and evaluate staff. Collectively, they hold responsibility for ensuring that teachers acquire and use the best available knowledge about curriculum, teaching, assessment and student support.

### Resource accountability in a reciprocal system

Although schools may be appropriately viewed as a key unit of change in education reform, the structuring of inequality in learning opportunities takes place outside the school in the government units where funding formulas, resource allocations and other education policies are developed and implemented. If students are to be well served, federal, state and local education agencies must meet certain standards of delivery that ensure school success.

## The Basics: Accountability Provisions in ESSA

### States develop their own accountability systems

Under ESSA, much of the responsibility for outlining and enforcing accountability has moved from the federal government to the states, which now are required to include the following indicators when developing their accountability systems:

- Proficiency in reading and math;
- Graduation rates for high schools;
- English language proficiency;
- For elementary and middle schools, student growth or another indicator that is valid, reliable and statewide (see graphic for examples of possible indicators); and

- At least one other indicator of school quality or success, such as measures of safety, student engagement or educator engagement (see graphic for examples of possible indicators); this indicator must weigh less than the other four indicators, in aggregate.

### States set targets for progress

Under ESSA, the adequate yearly progress system instituted under NCLB no longer exists. Rather than the federal government setting targets for states to meet, the states themselves must establish “ambitious state-designed long-term goals” with measurements of interim progress for:

- Improved academic achievement on state assessments;
- Graduation rates (if a five- or six-year graduation rate is used, the goal must be higher than for a four-year rate); and
- Progress in achieving English language proficiency for English learners.

### States identify low-performing schools based on the state-developed accountability system

Using the state-developed accountability system that includes all indicators, states must identify underperforming schools every three years and ensure that districts provide comprehensive support to the following categories of schools:

- The 5 percent lowest-performing schools;
- Schools with a graduation rate of less than 67 percent; and
- Schools in which at least one subgroup is consistently and significantly underperforming after a number of years of targeted support and improvement at the local level.

### States and districts develop intervention strategies

Schools and districts identified by the state-developed accountability system must receive support for improvement.

- **Targeted support and improvement:** Schools with significantly underperforming subgroups (as defined by the state) must develop plans with stakeholders, based on all indicators. Plans must include evidence-based strategies and must be approved and monitored by the district.
- **Comprehensive support and improvement:** Districts with identified schools must develop plans with stakeholders, based on all indicators. Plans must include evidence-based strategies and a resource equity component; must be approved by the district and the state; and must be monitored and reviewed by the state. Students at such schools are eligible for public school choice. If, after four years of comprehensive support and improvement, schools don’t meet state-defined criteria for exit, the state will take more rigorous action, which can include changes to school-level operations.

### Things to remember

- States set cut scores for proficiency rates.
- States choose the tests to be used.
- States now have flexibility to incorporate performance-based assessments.
- States can undertake audits to eliminate unnecessary or poor-quality testing, and can limit the aggregate amount of time that students spend taking tests.
- States can avoid “double testing” middle school students in math.
- For high schools, states or districts may choose to offer a nationally recognized test (like the SAT or ACT).
- ESSA maintains the 95 percent participation requirement, but the states determine how the requirement is factored into their overall accountability systems.
- There is no requirement that schools be given a single score or grade.
- Waivers are invalid beginning August 2016, but current are no longer being enforced.
- States are expected to have this accountability system up and running in the 2017-18 school year.

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# A Framework of Indicators for School Success

Academic Outcomes	Achievement on assessments	Standardized test results (proficiency, growth, disaggregated)
		Performance assessment results from common state tasks
		AP/IB or other college readiness tests
	Graduation and progression through school	Four-, five- and six-year adjusted cohort graduation rates
		Proportion of eighth graders who progress to ninth grade
		Dropout rates
Career and college readiness	Students who have completed college prep coursework, approved CTE sequence, or both	
	Students meeting standard on graduation portfolios, industry-approved certificants, licenses, or badges recognized by postsecondary institutions and businesses	
Opportunity to Learn	Curriculum access and participation	Full curriculum including science, history and the arts
		Rigorous courses and programs (e.g., college preparatory, AP)
		Standards-based curriculum materials and technology resources
	Access to resources	Ratios of teachers, counselors, nurses, paraprofessionals and specialists to students
		Teacher certification and length of teaching experience
		Safe and adequate facilities
School climate	Evidence from student and staff surveys about school offerings, instruction, supports, trust and belonging	
Teachers' opportunities to learn	Access to, and participation in, professional development	
Engagement & Support	Student	Attendance and chronic absenteeism
		Suspensions and expulsion rates
		Student perceptions of belonging, safety, engagement and school climate on student surveys
		Student attitudes toward learning
		Indicators of social-emotional skills
		Indicators of social-emotional supports
	Parent and community	Indicators of participation and engagement from parent surveys
Teacher	Indicators of participation and engagement from teacher surveys	

Disaggregated, change over time, compared to district and state



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