

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Background and Key Questions: Accountability, Reporting, and School Improvement Systems

ESSA—What should education advocates know?

There are **several key provisions** within ESSA that education advocates should know about. Below is a bit more detail on the requirements for **school accountability, reporting, and improvement** under ESSA.

What are they and why do they matter?

Accountability and school improvement systems are the systems that states use to measure how schools are doing for students, reward those that are serving all of their students well, and provide supports for those that are not.

School reporting systems provide data and transparency on measures of a school that may be important or informational to parents, the public, and other stakeholders, but that are not counted in a school's rating for accountability purposes.

Delaware's current accountability and reporting system is the [Delaware School Success Framework](#) (DSSF). It applies to all schools and districts in the state. The *accountability* indicators in the DSSF include **academic achievement, student growth, students on track to graduate, and college and career preparation**. The *reporting* indicators in the DSSF are called **context measure data** and include **a survey of teachers and students, school and/or district narratives, postsecondary outcomes** (the percentage of students that enroll in a postsecondary institution within a year after high school graduation), and **school demographic information**. While Delaware's system meets many of the requirements under ESSA, it will need to make **two significant changes** in order to comply with the law:

- Include English Language Proficiency as a separate indicator
- Disaggregate *all* indicators by specific sub-groups

What does ESSA require?

Goals and School Ratings in the State Accountability System: States must **set goals** for student performance in reading and math, and graduation rates. They must be set for all students, and specifically for low-income students, students from major racial/ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and English learners. They must require improvement for all groups and **faster improvement for the groups that have been behind**. Each state must then **rate schools** based on how they perform on these goals and other indicators, for all



students and for each student group. The indicators that are required to be used for developing school ratings are as follows:

- **Academic achievement:** For elementary and middle schools, this is proficiency rates (rates at which students meet state standards on an annual statewide assessment) for all students in reading/language arts relative to state goals. For high schools, states can also include student growth as part of this indicator.
- **Another academic indicator:** For high schools, this is the graduation rate for all students and each student group relative to state goals. For elementary and middle schools, this measure may include individual student growth or another statewide, valid, and reliable indicator of student learning.
- **English language proficiency:** This is a measure of the progress that a school's English learners are making toward English proficiency, relative to state goals.
- **Additional indicator of school quality:** Another valid, reliable, and statewide indicator of school quality, which may include measures of postsecondary readiness, student engagement, school climate, or other indicators.

The first three indicators in the accountability system (academic achievement, another academic indicator, and English proficiency) must each carry substantial weight, and together, carry much more weight than the additional measure of school quality. In addition to including these indicators, states must also explain what will happen to a school's rating if **fewer than 95 percent of all students**, or of any **group** of students, participate in the state assessment.

Supports and interventions: ESSA specifies three categories of schools that must receive **support intervention**:

- **Comprehensive Support and Improvement Schools:** This category includes the lowest performing five percent of Title I schools and all high schools with graduation rates below 67 percent. For these schools, LEAs must develop improvement plans, which may include a review of district- and school-level budgeting. The state has to review and approve these improvement plans and set "exit criteria" for these schools. If a school fails to meet these criteria within no more than four years (the state can set a shorter time frame), the state has to intervene.
- **Targeted Support and Improvement Schools:** These are schools where one or more groups of students are consistently underperforming. These schools must develop improvement plans, which have to be approved by their LEA. If schools fail to improve within an LEA-determined number of years, the LEA has to require additional action.
- **Additional Targeted Support and Improvement Schools:** These are schools that have one or more groups of students whose performance would place them in the

bottom five percent of Title I schools. Like Targeted Support and Improvement schools, these schools are required to put together improvement plans that must be approved by their LEA, but these improvement plans also have to address resource inequities. In addition, states must set exit criteria for these schools, and if schools don't meet these criteria in a state-determined number of years, they become Comprehensive Support and Improvement Schools.

Reporting: ESSA requires that states publish **annual reports** for LEAs and schools. These must include:

- Details of the **state accountability system**, including schools identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement and Targeted Support and Improvement
- Disaggregated results on **all accountability indicators**
- Disaggregated **assessment participation rates**
- Disaggregated results on **access to advanced coursework** (AP, IB, and dual enrollment classes)
- Disaggregated results on **discipline rates**
- Disaggregated results on **chronic absenteeism**
- The **professional qualifications of educators**
- State, local, and federal **per-pupil expenditures, by funding source**
- The number and percentage of students with the **most significant cognitive disabilities taking the alternate assessment**
- At the state level, results of the **National Assessment of Educational Progress**, as compared with national averages
- Disaggregated rates at which **high school graduates enroll in higher education**, if available

Helpful Links:

Delaware School Success Framework: <http://dssf.doe.k12.de.us/>

Delaware School Success Framework Reference Guide:

<http://www.doe.k12.de.us/cms/lib09/DE01922744/Centricity/Domain/310/Delaware%20School%20Success%20Framework%20Reference%20Document-Updated12.15-1.26.pdf>

Alliance for Excellent Education Fact Sheet on Accountability: <http://all4ed.org/reports-factsheets/every-student-succeeds-act-primer-accountability/>

Council of Chief State School Officers Critical Area Outline on Accountability: <http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2016/CriticalAreaOutlineAccountability.pdf>

Council of Chief State School Officers Critical Area Outline on School Improvement:
http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2016/ESSA/CCSSOCriticalAreaOutline_SchoolImprovementSupports.pdf

Foundation for Excellence in Education resource on school identification and intervention:
<http://all4ed.org/reports-factsheets/every-student-succeeds-act-primer-accountability/>