

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Background and Key Questions: Standards and Assessments

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 **state standards and assessments** under ESSA.

What are they and why do they matter?

Academic standards are a set of expectations for what **all students need to know and be able to do at each grade level**. Consistent, high expectations linked to the demands of college and career are **critical for ensuring that all students—not just some**—are held to the same bar.

Statewide, annual assessments are an important way of **measuring student progress consistently** against those standards. They provide parents and the public with objective information about whether students are academically on-track. They help educators benchmark the performance of their students against those across the state.

Delaware is one of more than **40 states to adopt the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)** in English language arts and mathematics and one of **17 states to adopt the Smarter Balanced Assessment** to measure progress against the CCSS. Full implementation of the standards, curriculum, and assessment was in place during the 2014-15 school year. As of 2015, Delaware is one of **15 states to adopt the Next Generation Science Standards**. By 2018-19 the state will implement an aligned assessment to measure progress against the new science standards.

What does ESSA require?

Statewide academic standards aligned with college and career: States have to demonstrate that they've adopted challenging academic standards for all public school students in math, reading/language arts, and science. These standards must be aligned with both the entrance requirements for credit-bearing coursework in college and the state's career and technical education standards.



Aligned standards for English learners: States must demonstrate that they've adopted standards for English-language proficiency for English learners that are aligned with the state's academic standards.

Meaningful alternate standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities: States can use alternate academic achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, but the standards must still be rigorous enough to prepare students for college and career.

Statewide, annual assessment: States have to test all students on statewide assessments in the following areas: reading/language arts and math every year in grades three through eight and once in high school; and science once between grades three and five, once between six and nine, and once again between 10 and 12. These tests must provide **valid, reliable, and comparable information** on whether all students are meeting state standards in each subject.

Assessment of English learners: States have to measure **English learners' progress toward English-language proficiency** on statewide assessments given to all English learners annually.

Strictly limited exceptions for students with disabilities: States can develop **alternate assessments aligned with alternate achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities**, but can administer these assessments to no more than **one percent** of all students statewide.

Options for assessment innovation: The U.S. Secretary of Education can establish a **pilot program for states that want to develop innovative assessment systems**, such as competency-based or performance-based assessments. Participating states can choose to initially try out these assessments in only some of their districts, but must use them statewide after successful piloting, or discontinue their use. These systems must also **meet all the technical requirements of statewide assessments, including providing comparable data for all students**.

Support for reducing unnecessary tests: The law encourages states to **review all the assessments** they and their districts give in order to get rid of low-quality or duplicative tests, and **provides funding** to states to support this process.

Helpful Links:

Rodel Foundation of Delaware Resources on Standards and Assessment:
<http://www.rodelfoundationde.org/issues-resources-standards-and-assessments/>

Delaware Assessment Inventory Results and Report:

<http://www.doe.k12.de.us/assessmentinventory>

The Center on Standards and Assessment Implementation resources on standards, assessment, and accountability: <http://www.csai-online.org/spotlight/every-student-succeeds-act-essa-assistance>

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) ESSA Critical Area Outline for Assessment:

<http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2016/CriticalAreaOutlineAssessment.pdf>

Foundation for Excellence in Education: Implications for Standards & Assessments:

<http://www.excelined.org/wp-content/uploads/ExcelinEd-ESSA-Webinar-2-Implications-for-Standards-and-Assessments-05-11-2016.pdf>

Alliance for Excellent Education Fact Sheet on Assessment: [http://all4ed.org/reports-](http://all4ed.org/reports-factsheets/every-student-succeeds-act-primer-assessments/)

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