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North Carolina and *The Every Student Succeeds Act*

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The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law by President Barack Obama on December 10, 2015. ESSA reauthorizes the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*, which was first enacted as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty."¹ **Since 1965, ESEA has represented the federal government's commitment to providing all of the nation's children with a fair, equitable, and high-quality education.**

ESSA replaces the most recent ESEA reauthorization, *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*, which had been in place since 2001.² At the time, NCLB passed with strong bipartisan support and was considered the most sweeping education reform law ever enacted in the United States. However, during implementation, problems with the law became apparent. NCLB required schools to ensure that all students made adequate yearly progress (AYP) on standardized assessments or risk losing federal funding, with the goal of 100 percent student proficiency by the 2013-2014 school year. In 2011, with a high number of states potentially facing sanctions, the Obama administration began to waive certain NCLB requirements in exchange for adopting the administration's preferred education policies.³

While not a complete shift from NCLB, ESSA gives states more discretion over education policy and places substantial restrictions on federal involvement in state-level education systems. As a result, **ESSA creates a significant opportunity for state and local policymakers to refocus on how best to improve public schools in America.**

This issue of *coNCepts* examines ESSA requirements in five key areas—**academic standards, assessments, school accountability, school improvement, and teacher quality**—and highlights places where adjustments in North Carolina policies are needed in order to remain eligible for federal education funding through ESSA.

Want more information on ESSA?

Visit www.hunt-institute.org/essa for a compilation of resources on the *Every Student Succeeds Act*, including our recent three-part *re:VISION* series.

Academic Standards

What remains from NCLB?

Under ESSA, states are still required to adopt rigorous academic standards for students in the subject areas of reading, mathematics and science.

What's new?

The law explicitly states that the U.S. Secretary of Education may not coerce or mandate states to adopt a particular set of standards, including the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

Additionally, ESSA requires states to align their standards with the entrance requirements for credit-bearing coursework in the state's system of public higher education **and** with relevant state-level career and technical education standards.

What's in place in North Carolina?

The *North Carolina Standard Course of Study* lists academic standards that describe what students should know and be able to do in each academic subject at each grade level. The goal of these standards is to prepare all students to be college and career ready upon the completion of high school.

In 2010, North Carolina adopted the CCSS in mathematics and English language arts. In 2012-2013, the North Carolina Standard Course of Study was revised to include the CCSS. In the same year, North Carolina adopted and implemented new, more rigorous *Essential Standards* in a number of other content areas as well.⁴

A 2015 review of the CCSS, required by the General Assembly, recommended no major revisions. The report is under consideration by the State Board of Education.⁵

What's next?

North Carolina's current academic standards align with requirements laid out by ESSA. No action is necessary from the state.

Assessments

What remains from NCLB?

Under ESSA, states are still required to test students annually in reading and math in grades three through eight and once in high school. States must also continue to test students in science at least once during each of the following grade spans: 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12.

The federal government also continues to require that at least **95 percent** of students in each school and district participate in each of the state's summative assessments.

What's new?

States may now **place a cap on the total amount of time students spend taking state assessments.**

States may choose to offer a nationally-recognized assessment like the SAT or ACT in lieu of a state exam for high school students. States also have the flexibility to administer an alternate assessment, aligned to academic standards for students with disabilities, to up to one percent of the student population.

In addition, ESSA allows states to be more innovative concerning the types of assessments they administer. States may choose to participate in a pilot program to develop and implement innovative assessments at the local level. States may also measure student achievement and growth through multiple statewide interim assessments during the course of the academic year rather than one summative assessment like the End-of-Grade test.

What's in place in North Carolina?

North Carolina currently administers the End-of-Grade and End-of-Course tests in reading, mathematics and science (as detailed in the table below). Additionally, in 11th grade, all high school students take the ACT test of college readiness, with eligible students also completing the ACT WorkKeys assessment of career readiness. **Results from these assessments are used in federal and state school accountability systems.**⁶

North Carolina Summative Assessment Program

Grades	Test	Subject(s)	Number of Required Tests
3-8	North Carolina End-of-Grade Test	English Language Arts, Math	12
5, 8	North Carolina End-of-Grade Test	Science	2
9-12	North Carolina End-of-Course Test	Math I, English II, Biology	3
11	ACT Test of College Readiness	English, Mathematics, Reading and Science	1
Eligible Students	ACT WorkKeys	Career Readiness Skills	1

The state also administers North Carolina Final Exams to students in core content area courses that do not currently have an End-of-Grade or End-of Course test.⁷ **Results from these assessments are not incorporated into federal or state accountability systems.**

Importantly, a 2014 state law declares that all changes to the state's assessment program are subject to legislative approval.⁸

What's next?

North Carolina's summative assessment system aligns with requirements laid out by ESSA. No action is necessary; however, the state has flexibility to implement innovative assessments if it so chooses.

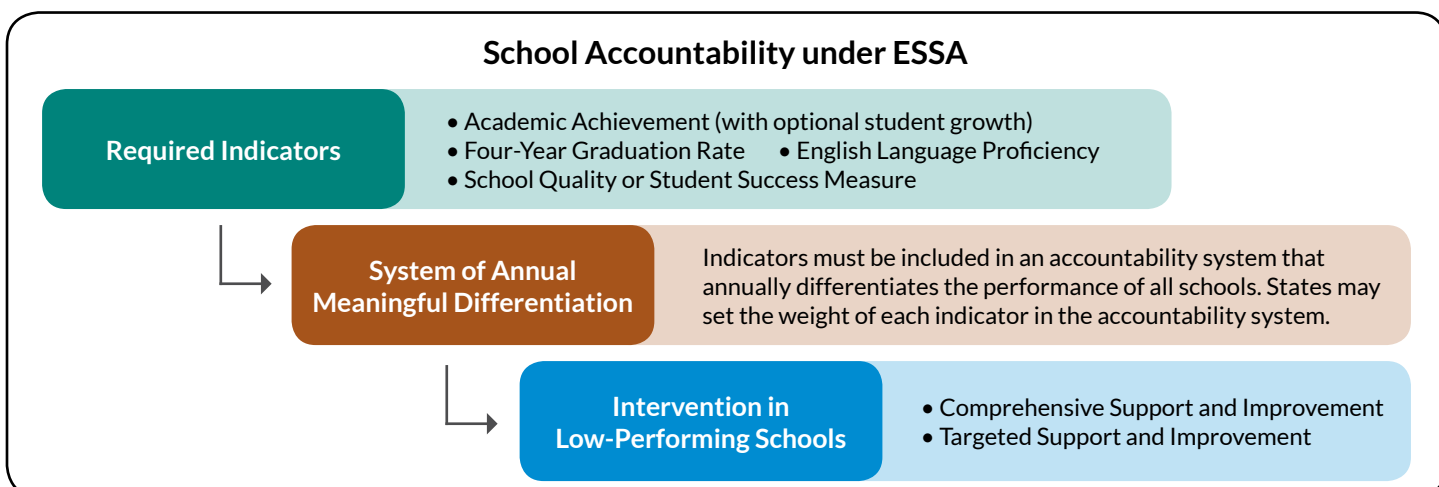
School Accountability

What remains from NCLB?

Under ESSA, states will still need to hold schools accountable for the performance of students on the states' summative assessments. States must also continue to disaggregate student performance by demographic subgroups.

What's new?

While states are no longer required to meet AYP benchmarks, ESSA requires that each state **design its own accountability system to identify low-performing schools**. Such systems must produce a summative determination that creates meaningful, annual differentiation between schools.

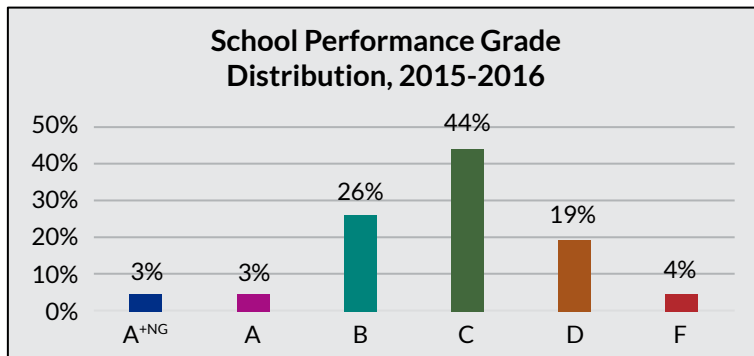


What's in place in North Carolina?

In the fall of each academic year, North Carolina public, charter and alternative schools receive School Performance Grades. School Performance Grades are calculated based on student performance on state-required summative assessments, with high schools also accountable for graduation rates and math course rigor. Student proficiency on applicable assessments makes up 80 percent of a school's grade, and student growth on those assessments makes up 20 percent of a school's grade.⁹

The School Performance Grading Scale (shown below) differentiates between the state's schools by awarding an A to the highest-scoring schools and an F to the lowest-performing schools.

A	85 to 100
B	70 to 84
C	55 to 69
D	40 to 54
F	0 to 39



A+NG = A with no significant achievement or graduation gaps.¹⁰

Notably, North Carolina's School Performance Grades do not consider the achievement of student subgroups—such as English Learners—nor do they include a measure of school quality or student success, as is required by the federal government.¹¹

What's next?

North Carolina's School Performance Grades *do not align* with ESSA requirements. The state must add additional indicators—school quality or student success, and the progress of English Learners—to its accountability system in order to remain eligible for federal education funding, including Title I.

School Improvement

What remains from NCLB?

States must continue to use a school accountability system to identify low-performing schools and subgroups.

What's new?

Under ESSA, states are required to identify schools for comprehensive support and improvement (CSI) and targeted support and improvement (TSI). CSI schools are defined as the lowest-performing five percent of schools, and high schools with graduation rates below 67 percent. TSI schools are defined as schools in which a subgroup of students is consistently underperforming.

ESSA allocates a portion of federal funds for intervention in CSI and TSI schools and requires districts to implement **evidence-based interventions** in these schools. Academic and instructional interventions in these schools must be approved and guided by the state. **However, the U.S. Secretary of Education may not prescribe the specific intervention or improvement strategy.**

What's in place in North Carolina?

In North Carolina, low-performing schools and districts are determined by a combination of School Performance Grades and student growth on assessments, as measured by the Education Value Added Assessment System (EVAAS).

Low-performing schools are defined as schools that receive a school performance grade of D or F **and** a student growth designation of "met expected growth" or "not met expected growth." Low-performing districts are defined as local education units in which the majority of schools have been identified as low-performing. **Importantly, because School Performance Grades do not take into account all the indicators required by ESSA, and because they fail to identify schools with**

consistently underperforming subgroups, the state’s low-performing designation does not comply with the federal guidelines for identifying CSI and TSI schools.

Currently, state law requires schools and districts designated as low-performing to develop a plan for improvement. Improvement plans must specifically address the strategies that will be implemented to improve the school performance grade and the student growth designation. Improvement plans do not currently require the use of evidence-based interventions, as described by ESSA.¹²

What’s next?

North Carolina’s identification of low-performing schools and districts *does not align* with requirements laid out by ESSA, as noted above. The state must adjust its school accountability system to identify schools for CSI and TSI.

Teacher Quality

What remains from NCLB?

NCLB addressed teacher quality by implementing the “highly qualified teacher” requirement. However, the law did not address teacher evaluation. ESSA eliminates all of the NCLB provisions related to teachers.

What’s new?

Under ESSA, teachers are no longer required to meet “highly qualified” requirements. Additionally, states are no longer required to provide teacher evaluation documentation to the U.S. Department of Education as required by NCLB waivers.

What’s in place in North Carolina?

In 2011-2012, North Carolina began using a new teacher evaluation rubric to evaluate teachers across the state. Teachers are evaluated by their principals on five professional teaching standards and can earn one of four professional ratings: developing, proficient, accomplished and distinguished.¹³

In 2012-2013, the State Board of Education added a sixth professional standard to teacher evaluations allowing the state to evaluate teachers based on the growth of their students on standardized assessments.¹⁴ The use of student growth in teacher evaluations—a requirement of the Obama administration’s *Race to the Top* grant program and later the NCLB waiver process—resulted in considerable criticism and objection from educators around the state. In 2016, when the passage of ESSA had eliminated the need for NCLB waivers, the State Board of Education unanimously approved the elimination of *Standard Six* from teacher evaluations.¹⁵

Additionally, the 2016 *Appropriations Act* created a series of pilot programs—to begin in the 2016-2017 academic year—designed to provide performance incentives and compensatory bonuses for teachers who contribute to positive student outcomes.¹⁶

- **Teacher Compensation Models and Advanced Teaching Roles:** A pilot grant program to allow select local education agencies to develop and implement advanced teaching roles and organizational models which link teacher performance and growth to salary increases.
- **Third-Grade Reading Teacher Performance Pilot Program:** A statewide program to provide bonuses to third-grade teachers whose students demonstrate high growth on the reading EOG.
- **AP/IB Teacher Bonus Pilot Program:** A statewide program to provide bonuses to high school teachers whose students earn a passing score on an Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate exam.
- **Industry Certifications and Credentials Teacher Bonus Pilot Program:** A statewide program to provide bonuses to teachers whose students earn an industry credential or certification through a career and technical education course.

What’s next?

North Carolina’s teacher evaluation systems align with ESSA requirements. No action is necessary from the state.

North Carolina's ESSA Plan Development

Much of North Carolina's ESSA work will be concentrated within the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). DPI is responsible for consulting external stakeholders—including the Governor's Office and state legislature—and writing the state's ESSA plan. The final plan must be approved by the State Board of Education and the U.S. Department of Education before going into effect during the 2017-2018 school year. Notably, states will not be required to identify low-performing schools under ESSA until the 2018-2019 school year.

Department of Public Instruction Timeline for ESSA Plan¹⁷

January 2017	Present ESSA Plan to General Assembly Education Committees
January 2017	Submit ESSA Plan to Governor's Office for 30-day review period
February 2017	Finalize ESSA Plan
March 2017	Seek State Board of Education approval of ESSA Plan
April 3, 2017	Submit ESSA Plan to the U.S. Department of Education

Notably, because many of North Carolina's education policies are linked to state statutes, considerable cooperation between DPI, the State Board of Education and the General Assembly will be required to achieve a cohesive education system under ESSA.

Considerations for NC Policymakers

Key Points:

- ESSA provides states with increased flexibility to design their own state-level education policies. **States should consider ESSA as an opportunity to revisit and improve upon key components of their education systems.**
- Under ESSA, North Carolina maintains control over its academic content standards and will not be required to make adjustments.
- The state may keep its current assessment system but has flexibility to implement innovative assessments.
- School Performance Grades do not align with ESSA's school accountability requirements. **The state will need to make adjustments to its school accountability system to comply with ESSA.**
- The school accountability system **must be adjusted to accurately identify low-performing schools for comprehensive and targeted support and improvement.**
- The current teacher evaluation system may still be used, but North Carolina is no longer required to report teacher evaluation data to the U.S. Department of Education.

Questions for Reflection:

- Do North Carolina's current academic standards effectively guide instruction in key content areas while also holding students to high standards? If not, what improvements should be made?
- Do the state's summative assessments accurately measure student achievement and growth in key content areas? What adjustments and innovations can be made to increase the value and efficacy of student assessments?
- Does our state's current accountability system account for the achievement of all student groups, including traditionally low-performing subgroups? If not, how can the state hold schools accountable for the performance of all students?
- What academic and school quality indicators could be added to the state's school performance grades to align with ESSA's school accountability requirements?
- How will our state promote evidence-based strategies for the improvement of low-performing schools?

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