



RESOURCE TITLE:

50-State Comparison: States' School Accountability Systems

School accountability systems can serve many purposes, including sharing information, measuring progress toward state and local goals, and supporting greater educational equity. Given the important role accountability systems play in states' education systems, states have taken the opportunity provided by the Every Student Succeeds Act to improve upon their existing systems.

ESSA offered states more authority over their accountability systems than they had under previous federal law. Throughout the first five years of implementation, states have tweaked their systems and begun to collect data that provide a more complete picture of school performance. States have also begun or will soon begin identifying schools for support and improvement using the metrics outlined in their state plans.

This resource captures where state accountability systems are by providing a national overview of these systems as described in state ESSA plans, current state statute and regulation, or other state education agency resources. In some cases, states may operate multiple systems to ensure school quality. While each

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state must weigh the pros and cons of codifying its accountability system, many states' current policies do not currently align with their ESSA plans. This resource highlights how states are implementing ESSA requirements.

Each state's accountability system is unique, so some nuances may not be represented in this 50-State Comparison.

Click on the links below for 50-State Comparisons showing how all states approach school accountability. Or choose to view a specific state's approach by going to the **individual state profiles** page.

Rating Systems

While ESSA requires states to report on school performance information, including the below accountability measures, it does not prescribe the type of report card or rating systems that states use. With this flexibility, states have chosen several types of report cards, or rating systems, that are publicly available on their state education agency webpages. These include:

- A-F Rating System
- Descriptive
- Index Rating System
- 1-5 Stars
- Dashboard
- Federal Tiers of Support

See the Citations data point for links to the state education agency webpages and state report cards.

Subgroups

ESSA (§1111(c)(2)) requires states to collect, disaggregate and report data on certain student groups, namely, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with economically disadvantaged backgrounds, children with disabilities and English learners. States have the option to include other groups. Some states collected data on other student groups for accountability or only reporting purposes, including students experiencing homelessness and youth in foster care.

This data point includes those groups that the state will disaggregate the data by for accountability calculations. For additional information on other student groups, see state report cards.

Indicators and Weights

ESSA (§1111(c)(4)(b)) requires states to report on various performance measures, known as indicators. States are required to measure student academic achievement, student growth, progress of English language proficiency, graduation rates, and an indicator of school quality and student success (SQSS).

States are also required to specify how those indicators will be weighted in the overall school performance rating system. The first four indicators (achievement, growth, English learner proficiency and graduation rates) are required to carry much greater weight than that given to the SQSS measure.

Indicators and weights are typically different for elementary and middle schools, and high schools. For instance, elementary and middle schools are not graded on graduation rates, high schools are typically not graded on growth and the SQSS measures may differ across grade bands. The indicators and weights have been separated by those required for elementary and middle schools and those required for high schools. The SQSS measure for each state is included in the Indicators and Weights data point, with additional details provided in the SQSS Measure data point.

SQSS Measure

As detailed above, states have significant flexibility in the SQSS measure. ESSA (§1111(c)(4)(b)(v)(I)) suggests potential measures, including chronic absenteeism, educator engagement, college and career readiness and school climate. While many states have taken those suggestions, others have included other indicators, including school discipline and ninth graders on track to graduate.

This data point takes the SQSS indicators and includes additional information about how it is measured or what activities can be counted toward that indicator.

Assessment for Accountability

ESSA (§1111(b)(2)(B)(v)(I)) requires states to assess students in mathematics and English language arts each year in grades three through eight, and once in high school. They're also assessed in science three times — once in each specific grade span (3-5, 6-9 and 10-12). For accountability purposes, only the mathematics and English language arts assessments are included in the achievement indicator; however, some states do include science achievement in their SQSS measure.

States may be part of a consortia (e.g., Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium or Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers). They may use college-entrance exams (PSAT, ACT, SAT) as the high school exam, or they may work with various vendors to develop their own assessment systems.

For this data point, we included the assessment that is used in grades three through eight and high school.

Citations

Education Commission of the States used various sources to compile this resource, including state statute and regulations, ESSA plans, state education agency webpages and resources (including accountability technical manuals), and state report cards. Those sources have been provided for each state to provide a full picture of the state's accountability system; though each source may not have been used in the compilation of information.

All Data Points

Key Takeaways


- At least 20 states include student subgroups beyond what is required in ESSA.
- States have significant flexibility in the school quality and student success indicator. The most common SQSS measures are chronic absenteeism, college and career readiness, and school climate or safety.
 - About 36 states and D.C. include chronic absenteeism, or some measure of student and/or teacher attendance, in their school quality and student success indicator.

- At least 37 states and D.C. include a college and career readiness measure as part of the school quality and student success indicator.
- Around 12 states and D.C. use a school climate indicator, including suspension or discipline rates or school climate surveys given to students.
- At least eight states and D.C. use assessments developed by one of two consortia, Smarter Balanced Assessment System or the Partnership for Assessment of readiness for College and Careers.
- About 22 states use a college entrance exam (ACT, PSAT, SAT) as the high school assessment for accountability.

Related Resources


- **ESSA: Quick guides on top issues**
- **50-State Comparison: State Summative Assessments**
- **Assessments 101: A policymaker's guide to K-12 assessments**
- **COVID-19 Series: Accountability and School Improvement**

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