

Planning for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): Standards, Assessment, and Accountability

On December 10, 2015, the president signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. With the authorization and implementation of ESSA, states were expected to submit state plans aligned with ESSA provisions regarding standards, assessment, and accountability. All consolidated state plans had to be submitted to the U.S. Department of Education for review by September 18, 2017.

The tables below, and the related questions that follow each one, highlight key ESSA standards-, assessment-, and accountability-related requirements for states; specifically, those requirements for which CSAI can provide implementation support.

Standards

What ESSA says	What support CSAI provides
<p>State must develop or demonstrate challenging state academic standards.</p> <p>[Sec.1111. State Plans, (b) Challenging Academic Standards and Academic Assessments, S. 1177–2]</p>	<p>Assistance in identifying, contextualizing, and disseminating high-quality resources to support the development and/or implementation of college and career ready standards.</p> <p>National scans of the status of states' academic standards.</p> <p>Assistance in demonstrating alignment between challenging state academic standards and comprehensive assessment systems.</p>
<p>States must demonstrate that their standards are aligned with “entrance requirements for credit-bearing coursework in the system of public higher education in the State and relevant State career and technical education standards.”</p> <p>[Sec.1111. State Plans, (b) Challenging Academic Standards and Academic Assessments (D) Alignment, S. 1177–3]</p>	<p>Resources and technical assistance to support states with standards review and alignment, including state revision of ELP standards to address different levels of English proficiency.</p>
<p>States must have English language proficiency (ELP) standards for the education of English learners that align to the state academic standards and that address different levels of English proficiency.</p> <p>[Sec.1111. State Plans, (b) Challenging Academic Standards and Academic Assessments (F) English Language Proficiency Standards, S. 1177–24]</p>	

Related Questions for State Education Agency Leadership

- ❖ How will we monitor standards implementation across all districts and schools? What supports will we provide to support standards implementation?
- ❖ How do we know and how can we demonstrate that our current standards are “aligned with entrance requirements for credit-bearing coursework in the system of public higher education in the State and relevant State career and technical education standards”?
- ❖ If new standards have been implemented to meet ESSA requirements, what resources or supports will state, school, and district staff need for full implementation?
- ❖ Do we need to review our English language proficiency (ELP) standards to ensure that they meet ESSA’s requirement that ELP standards address different proficiency levels?

Assessment

What ESSA says	What support CSAI provides
<p>State assessments may be administered in a single summative assessment or assessments that are given throughout the school year (that result in a summative score) to provide more frequent information on student achievement and growth.</p> <p>[Sec. 1111. State Plans, (b) Challenging Academic Standards and Academic Assessments, (2) Academic Assessments, S. 1177–24].</p>	<p>Guidance and resources on state assessments, specifically related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • composition of the assessment system • alignment (including computer-adaptive-testing [CAT] alignment and alternate assessment alignment) • development process (including application of Universal Design for Learning [UDL]) • improving assessment quality • national scans of state assessment practices • early childhood assessments • ELP assessments • alternate assessments • administration of interim assessments • understanding provisions for administering end-of-course mathematics assessments in place of grade-level mathematics assessments • building comprehensive and coherent assessment systems
<p>States may include assessments that measure student academic growth and assessments to be partially delivered in the form of portfolios, projects, or extended performance tasks.</p> <p>[Sec. 1111. State Plans, (b) Challenging Academic Standards and Academic Assessments, (2) Academic Assessments, (B) Requirements, S. 1177–25]</p>	
<p>States will need to demonstrate, in consultation with LEAs, that they have implemented assessments that are of high quality and are aligned to the state standards.</p> <p>[Sec. 1111. State Plans, (b) Challenging Academic Standards and Academic Assessments, (E) State Authority, S. 1177–29]</p>	

What ESSA says

“Innovative assessment systems” may be piloted by a limited number of states to experiment with their own locally designed competency-based and/or performance-based assessments.

[Sec. 1204. Innovative Assessment and Accountability Demonstration Authority, (3) Initial Demonstration Authority and Expansion, S. 1177–84]

Funds from certain ESSA programs may be used by States and districts to conduct assessment audits, improve the quality of assessments, and develop systems to support the use of assessment results to improve teaching and learning.

[Sec. 1202. State Option to Conduct Assessment System Audit, S. 1177–80]

Beginning with FY17 funds, section 1202 of the ESSA provides for state grants, and for states to make sub-grants to districts to:

- ✱ **conduct state and district audits (that include such things as schedule, purpose, and feedback on the tests from stakeholders);**
- ✱ **develop state plans to improve and streamline the State assessment system, such as:**
 - ✱ **eliminating unnecessary tests**
 - ✱ **disseminating best practices, and**
 - ✱ **supporting district efforts to streamline assessments and regularly review assessments.**

States may administer locally selected, nationally recognized high school academic assessments, in lieu of state assessments, provided they meet peer review requirements.

[Sec. 1111. State Plans, (2) Academic Assessments, (H) Locally-Selected Assessment, S. 1177–30]

States must submit their assessments for peer review based on the guidance that was released by the U.S. Department of Education in October 2015.

What support CSAI provides

Serving as a thought partner to states as they consider implementation of innovative assessment systems.

Information on what federal funds can be used for piloting assessments.

Information on innovative assessments being used by other states.

Technical assistance regarding the testing audit process (e.g., examining relevance of tests, how well tests reflect and measure learning standards, how coherent tests are within the same system).

Support for designing and conducting an assessment inventory to collect information on how many assessments are administered, how much time assessments take, and assessment alignment to standards and academic initiatives.

Tools that help users present state, district, and local assessment information in visual formats that can be readily shared with stakeholders.

Guidance on connecting high school assessments with college and career pathways/career preparation.

Guidance and technical assistance regarding peer review requirements impacting the selection of a nationally recognized high school academic assessment.

Guidance on appropriate documentation and evidence to meet peer review requirements, including CSAI-developed resources available for dissemination.

Related Questions for State Education Agency Leadership

- ✿ How do the components (state and local assessments) of the state's comprehensive assessment system align to our current standards?
- ✿ Is there still an interest in, or need for, revising the assessment system to include innovative assessments that can be used to demonstrate student mastery or proficiency?
- ✿ How will we provide additional oversight for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) that administer alternative assessments for students with significant cognitive disabilities if those LEAs are assessing more than 1 percent of their total student population via these assessments?
- ✿ Should we consider making nationally recognized high school assessments available for selection by LEAs? If so, what is our plan for establishing the technical criteria needed to determine if such assessments meet Peer Review requirements?
- ✿ Should we set a limit on the amount of time devoted to the administration of assessments for each grade?
- ✿ What languages other than English are present (to a "significant extent") in our student population, if any? What assessments and associated resources need to be available in languages other than English?
- ✿ Should we conduct an assessment audit (i.e., an assessment inventory) to determine what local assessments are being utilized and the amount of student time spent on assessments?
- ✿ Do the current ELP assessments used in the state align with our ELP standards?
- ✿ What do we want the state comprehensive assessment system to look like in five years? In ten years?
- ✿ What is the role of summative assessment data in our accountability system?
- ✿ What is the role of a summative assessment in a comprehensive, balanced assessment system?

Accountability

What ESSA says

Places responsibility and authority for the development of accountability systems at the state level. States are responsible for setting their own long-term and short-term goals for improvement, which would require them to collect data on multiple factors for all students and for subgroups of students.

[Sec. 1111. State Plans, (4) Description of System, (A) Establishment of Long-Term Goals, S. 1177–34]

States must take low testing participation into consideration in their accountability systems.

[Sec. 1111. State Plans, (4) Description of System, (E) Annual Measurement of Achievement, S. 1177–36]

In their accountability systems, States will set long-term goals and measures of interim progress for:

[Sec. 1111. State Plans, (4) Description of System, (A) Establishment of Long-Term Goals, S. 1177–34]

- ✱ academic achievement on statewide assessments;
- ✱ elementary and middle schools, at least one other measure of academic readiness (e.g., growth on the statewide tests);
- ✱ high schools, must also include an indicator using four-year adjusted cohort graduation rates;
- ✱ high schools, which may also include 5- and 6-year adjusted cohort graduation rates; and
- ✱ English language learners (ELLs), including increases in the percentage of ELLs making progress in achieving English language proficiency at least one other valid measure of school quality or success (e.g. school climate and safety, student or educator engagement).

What support CSAI provides

Guidance on the full transition to ESSA in 2017–2018 and information about what will be required in the interim.

Support for communication regarding annual report cards to share information on student performance.

Guidance for tracking state, district, and school progress toward academic targets.

Guidance on connecting assessments to accountability systems.

National scans of the composition of state ESSA plans and accountability systems.

Guidance and support in communicating to stakeholders about accountability decisions and collecting stakeholder feedback on accountability decisions.

Support related to building systems that meet the law.

Support for how to accurately measure student progress toward established interim and long-term academic goals.

Resources for dissemination in instances where districts or schools are not meeting interim or long-term academic goals.

Related Questions for State Education Agency Leadership

- ✿ What is our overall approach to implementing a system that “meaningfully differentiates” all public schools in the state? How will we gauge how well the system is being implemented and operated?
- ✿ How are we measuring interim progress for all students and subgroups? How do measures of interim progress factor into accountability plans?
- ✿ For our English learner students, what progress toward attaining English language proficiency do we want to see? How do we define “progress”? What is a reasonable timeline for achieving our goal? What additional supports will be provided in instances where progress is not being made?
- ✿ How will we monitor indicators and ensure that the appropriate weights are applied to each?
- ✿ How will we ensure that definitions for “substantial” and “much greater” are collectively understood and applied?
- ✿ For the indicators that are not the “additional school quality or student success indicators,” how will we ensure that “much greater” weight is assigned?
- ✿ How will we ensure the requirement that percent of all students, and 95 percent of students in each subgroup, participate in assessments? If this requirement is not met, how will our action plan be implemented?
- ✿ What will our response be if districts or schools do not meet established high school graduation targets?
- ✿ How will we evaluate how well the school quality/ student success measure aligns with broader efforts for school and academic improvement?



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