



Measuring Success

An Overview of New School Classification Indicators Under ESSA

Part of a Series on Implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act

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A table in this brief contains a correction.

For years, federally driven school classification systems focused almost entirely on test scores. This was done by design to emphasize critical reading and math skills and to make systems simple, transparent, and objective. With time, however, it became clear that this framework was too rigid. Parents and stakeholders viewed school quality through a wider lens, and state systems overlooked important elements such as school culture and climate.

The bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) ushered in a new way to improve K-12 schools.¹ ESSA promised states the opportunity to create more holistic school classification systems using new measures of school quality or student success—without losing sight of academic achievement.

Some states had already started down this path, broadening the measures they used to assess school quality in response to federal education policy changes made in 2011 through the Obama administration's No Child Left Behind waivers.² Building on this progress, ESSA requires all states to rethink their school classification systems in consultation with community members.

By the start of the 2017-18 school year, states must complete their plans to meet ESSA's requirements. So far, 16 states and Washington, D.C., have submitted their plans to the U.S. Department of Education, which must review and approve them before they are put into action. The remaining 34 states—plus Puerto Rico and the Bureau of Indian Education—must submit their plans by September 2017 to undergo this same process.³

As plans roll in, policymakers, advocates, and other stakeholders have their eye on certain policies, including how states expand their classification indicators to include measures other than test scores and graduation rates. This issue brief explores which new indicators of school quality or student success states use and how they include

them in their school classification systems. States are also considering including them in their accountability systems outside of school classifications—for example, by publicly reporting and/or using data to inform the development of intervention and support plans. The brief concludes with recommendations for states as they finalize their plans.

Indicator overview

ESSA requires states to use at least five indicators to classify schools:

1. Academic achievement in reading and math
2. Another academic indicator, such as student growth in reading and math
3. Four-year high school graduation rates, with the option to include extended-year rates
4. Progress toward English language proficiency (ELP)
5. At least one measure of school quality or student success

The law gives states a handful of suggestions for the fifth indicator, including student or educator engagement; student access to and completion of advanced coursework; student postsecondary readiness; school climate and safety; or any other measure that meets the law’s technical requirements. States also have the flexibility to use multiple indicators or to use multiple measures within each indicator of school quality or student success. Throughout this brief, the terms “measures” and “indicators” are used interchangeably, unless referring to multiple measures—or components—of one indicator.

This brief considers any indicator to be an indicator of school quality or student success if it does not measure: academic achievement or student-level growth on state assessments in all academic subjects—see the “Indicator analysis” section for more; four-, five-, six-, or seven-year graduation rates; or ELP. It organizes school quality or student success indicators into the four categories below and analyzes how much each category contributes to school ratings, on average, in statewide school classification systems.⁴

1. Early warning indicators
2. Persistence indicators
3. College- and career-readiness indicators
4. Enrichment and environment indicators

Every state includes at least one indicator from the four categories, and a handful of plans—Washington, D.C.’s, Louisiana’s, Massachusetts’s, New Mexico’s, and North Dakota’s—will use at least one indicator from each category.⁵ Overall, the 17 submitted ESSA plans include nearly 40 indicators—measured in a variety of ways—across all four categories of indicators.⁶ On average, these measures contribute to around 20 percent of school ratings.⁷ For state-specific information, see CAP’s “School Accountability in First-Round ESSA State Plans.”

TABLE 1
Number of states using measures of school quality or student success, by category

Category	Number of states
Early warning indicators	16
Persistence indicators	7
College- and career-readiness indicators	13
Enrichment and environment indicators	13

Note: This analysis excludes four- and extended-year graduation rates from the persistence indicators category.
 Source: Data are based on author's analysis of ESSA state plans. See U.S. Department of Education, "ESSA State Plan Submission," available at <https://ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/statesubmission.html> (last accessed July 2017).

TABLE 2
Average weighting of school quality or student success indicators across states, by category

Category	Average percentage of weightings
Early warning indicators	10%
Persistence indicators	8%
College- and career-readiness indicators	20%
Enrichment and environment indicators	11%

Note: This analysis excludes four- and extended-year graduation rates from the persistence indicators category. Average percentages exclude indicator weightings that could not be unpacked from other categories of indicators or that are not yet finalized. Average percentages also exclude indicators that are not weighted.

Source: Data are based on author's analysis of ESSA state plans. See U.S. Department of Education, "ESSA State Plan Submission," available at <https://ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/statesubmission.html> (last accessed July 2017).

Early warning indicators

Sixteen states use an early warning indicator, which helps educators identify at-risk students. Thirteen states use a measure of chronic absenteeism; four states measure attendance; and seven states include an "on track to graduate" measure. Of these states, early warning indicators are an average of 10 percent of school ratings.⁸

For example, Connecticut's "on track to graduate" indicator measures the percentage of ninth-graders earning at least five full-year credits.⁹ Massachusetts, on the other hand, measures the percentage of students who fail a ninth-grade course.¹⁰ Illinois uses a hybrid approach, counting students as on track if they earn at least five full-year course credits in ninth grade and no more than one semester F in a core course their first year of high school.¹¹

TABLE 3
Early warning indicators

Number of states	Weighting
8	0% through 10%
4	11% through 20%
0	21% through 30%
0	31% through 40%
0	41% through 50%

Note: Four states are excluded from this figure. The weighting of Arizona and North Dakota's early warning indicators could not be unpacked from another category of indicators. The weighting of Delaware's early warning indicators is not yet finalized, and Michigan will not weight its indicators.

Source: Data are based on author's analysis of ESSA state plans. See U.S. Department of Education, "ESSA State Plan Submission," available at <https://ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/statesubmission.html> (last accessed July 2017).

TABLE 4
Early warning indicators

First round, ESSA state plans

Indicator	State-defined measures	State
Attendance	Daily average percentage of enrolled students who were present in school	D.C.
	Percentage of students who have regular attendance	ME
	95 percent attendance, not counting school-related absences (included in choice-ready framework, see college- and career-readiness indicators)	ND
	95 percent attendance, junior and senior year (included as requirement in composite college- and career-readiness indicator)	IL
Chronic absenteeism	Percentage of students absent for 10 percent or more of the school year (excused absences vary by state)	AZ, CO, CT, DE, IL, MA, MI, NJ, NM, OR, TN
	Percentage of students missing 18 school days or more during the school year	NV
	Percentage of enrolled students who were present for 90 percent or more of enrolled days or growth in 90 percent attendance	D.C.
On track to graduate	Percentage of ninth-graders earning at least five full-year credits in the year	CT
	Percentage of ninth-graders earning at least five full-year credits and no more than one semester F in a core course in their first year of high school	IL
	Percentage of ninth-graders earning four or more combined credits in at least four of the following subjects: English language arts; mathematics; science; social studies; and/or world languages	DE
	Percentage of first-time ninth-graders who earn at least one-quarter of their required graduation credits at the end of their first year in high school	OR
	Credit accumulation index (up to seven or more credits)	LA
	Percentage of students that fail a ninth-grade class	MA
	Number of students at the end of eighth grade with required units of credit	NV

Source: Based on the author's review of the submitted consolidated state plans of 16 states and Washington, D.C., under the Every Student Succeeds Act. See U.S. Department of Education, "ESSA State Plan Submission," available at <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/statesubmission.html> (last accessed July 2017).

Persistence indicators

ESSA requires states to use at least the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate for high school ratings, and 13 states include an optional extended cohort graduation rate, such as five-, six-, or seven-year rates. In addition, seven states include persistence indicators beyond what the law requires, which this analysis considers to be measures of school quality or student success. For example, three states use a dropout measure, and six states include alternate or modified graduation indicators such as GED diploma attainment. Of these seven states, additional persistence indicators are an average of 8 percent of high school ratings.¹²

TABLE 5
Persistence indicators

Number of states	Weighting
4	0% through 10%
2	11% through 20%
0	21% through 30%
0	31% through 40%
0	41% through 50%

Note: One state—Louisiana—is excluded from this figure, because the weighting of its persistence indicators cannot be unpacked from the weighting of its college- and career-readiness indicators.

Source: Data are based on author's analysis of ESSA state plans. See U.S. Department of Education, "ESSA State Plan Submission," available at <https://ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/statesubmission.html> (last accessed July 2017).

Oregon, for example, uses a five-year high school completion rate, which is the percentage of students earning a diploma, an extended diploma, a GED diploma, or an adult high school diploma. This indicator will also help the state designate alternative and youth correction schools—where students often need more time to complete a degree—for comprehensive or targeted support and improvement.¹³

TABLE 6
Persistence indicators

First round, ESSA state plans

Indicator	State-defined measures	State
Dropout rate	Percentage of students enrolled in grades 7 through 12 who leave school during a single school year without subsequently attending another school or educational program.	CO
	Annual dropout rate.	MA
	Dropouts accrue zero points in credit accumulation index (see early warning indicators).	LA
Alternate or modified graduation indicator	Five-year cohort graduation rate plus percentage of students still enrolled in high school.	MA
	Number of total graduates (regardless of time frame) divided by the number of students in the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate.	D.C.
	Five-year high school completion rate, defined as the percentage of students earning a diploma, a modified diploma, an extended diploma, a GED diploma, or an adult high school diploma.	OR
	High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) or HiSET plus any Career and Technical Education credential.	LA
	Growth in four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate.	NM
	Rate of GED diploma completion.	ND

Source: Based on the author's review of the submitted consolidated state plans of 16 states and Washington, D.C., under the Every Student Succeeds Act. See U.S. Department of Education, "ESSA State Plan Submission," available at <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/statesubmission.html> (last accessed July 2017).

College- and career-readiness indicators

Thirteen states will include a measure of college and career readiness in their school classification systems.¹⁴ Broadly, these indicators include participation in or performance on advanced coursework or postsecondary entry exams; career preparedness measures; postsecondary outcomes; and other measures of postsecondary readiness, such as GPA or high school diploma pathways. Of states that include these measures, college- and career-readiness indicators are, on average, 20 percent of high school ratings.¹⁵

Many states use a college- and career-readiness index or rubric. Arizona schools, for example, can earn up to two points per graduating senior based on a variety of indicators, including meeting SAT or ACT cut scores and benchmarks for ACT WorkKeys assessments, which measure work-place skills.¹⁶ Louisiana schools earn index points based on the strength of the diploma that students receive, from a high school equivalency credential to a high school diploma plus an associate degree.¹⁷ North Dakota's choice-ready framework, on the other hand, measures the percentage of students who are on track to graduate through three pathways—college ready, career ready, and military ready—each with unique requirements.¹⁸

TABLE 7
College- and career-readiness indicators

Number of states	Weighting
2	0% through 10%
5	11% through 20%
3	21% through 30%
0	31% through 40%
1	41% through 50%

Note: Two states are excluded from this figure. The weighting of Delaware's college- and career-readiness indicators is not yet finalized, and Michigan will not weight its indicators.

Source: Data are based on author's analysis of ESSA state plans. See U.S. Department of Education, "ESSA State Plan Submission," available at <https://ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/statesubmission.html> (last accessed July 2017).

TABLE 8
College- and career-readiness indicators

First round, ESSA state plans

Description	Indicator	State-defined measures	State
Advanced coursework	Advanced coursework or exams—participation	Percentage of students in grades 11 and 12 who participate in two Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), or dual enrollment courses.	CT
		Percentage of students taking at least one AP or IB exam.	D.C.
		Percentage of students who successfully complete advanced courses (defined as AP, IB, honors, etc.) in a school year.	MA
		Percentage of students in grades 11 and 12 successfully completing advanced coursework (dual enrollment, early middle college, Career and Technical Education (CTE), AP, and IB).	MI
		Composite indicator that includes percentage of graduates completing four early postsecondary opportunities (EPSOs), including: AP; Cambridge International Examinations (CIE); College Level Examination Program (CLEP); dual enrollment; IB; local dual credit; and statewide dual credit.	TN
	Advanced coursework or exams—performance	Percentage of students in grades 11 and 12 who attained benchmark scores on AP or IB exam.	CT
		Students earn points in college- and career-readiness indicator menu for meeting cut score on any AP exam.	AZ
		Students earn points in college- and career-readiness indicator menu for passing college-level English, math, science, social studies, or a foreign language course for which college credit can be earned with an A, a B, or a C—that is, dual enrollment and concurrent enrollment.	AZ
		Students earn points in college- and career-readiness indicator menu for meeting cut score on CLEP; Cambridge A or AS; or IB English, math, social studies, science, or foreign language exam.	AZ
		Percentage of students who score 3+ on at least one AP exam and/or 4+ on at least one IB exam.	D.C.
		An AP exam of 3 or better—included in Delaware's composite indicator that measures the number of grade 12 students meeting one or more of eight college- and/or career-preparedness options divided by the total number of grade 12 students; included in North Dakota's choice-ready framework, which measures the percentage of students who are on track to graduate by meeting multiple requirements in three different pathways; included in Vermont's composite indicator that measures the number of graduates in each school that have met 1 of 8 college- and career-readiness options divided by the total number of graduates.	DE, ND, VT
		Scoring a 4 or better on an IB exam (included in composite indicator and choice-ready framework, see above).	DE, ND

(continues)

Description	Indicator	State-defined measures	State
Advanced coursework <i>(continued)</i>	Advanced coursework or exams— performance <i>(continued)</i>	Earning postsecondary credit attainment with a B or higher outside of a state-approved program of study (included in composite indicator, see above).	DE
		An English language arts AP exam score of 3 or better (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator that has a menu of indicators for several pathways).	IL
		A math AP exam score of 3 or better (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator, see above).	IL
		A, B, or C in an English language arts AP course (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator, see above).	IL
		A, B, or C in a math AP course (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator, see above).	IL
		A, B, or C in a dual credit English course (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator, see above).	IL
		A, B, or C in a dual credit math course (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator, see above).	IL
		An English language arts IB exam score of 4 or better (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator, see above).	IL
		A math IB exam score of 4 or better (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator, see above).	IL
		Earning an A, a B, or a C in algebra 2 (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator and choice-ready framework, see above).	IL, ND
		Passing AP/IB/CLEP score (part of an index that awards points to students based on the strength of diploma received).	LA
		At least one passing course grade for core curriculum credit in AP, college credit, dual enrollment, or IB (included in strength-of-diploma index, see above).	LA
		Earning an A, a B, or a C in an AP course (included in choice-ready framework, see above).	ND
		Earning an A, a B, or a C in a dual credit course (included in choice-ready framework, see above).	ND
		Score of 50 or higher on CLEP assessments (included in composite indicator, see above).	VT
		Score of 24 points or higher on IB assessments (included in composite indicator, see above).	VT
C or better in any accredited college course (included in composite indicator, see above).	VT		
Postsecondary entry exams	Performance on college entry exams, such as SAT or ACT	Percentage of students in grades 11 and 12 who attained benchmark scores on SAT or ACT exam.	CT
		Students earn points in college- and career-readiness indicator menu for meeting cut score on ACT English, math, reading, or science exam.	AZ
		Students earn points in college- and career-readiness indicator menu for meeting cut score on SAT English or math exam.	AZ
		Students earn points in college- and career-readiness indicator menu for meeting cut score on the ACCUPLACER assessments; the Assessment and Learning in Knowledge Spaces program; the COMPASS test; or the Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education English program; and reading, writing, math, social studies, science, or foreign language exam.	AZ
		Percentage of students meeting or exceeding the college-ready benchmark on the SAT or ACT.	D.C.
		Percentage of students meeting or exceeding a percentile threshold as determined by the state.	D.C.
		SAT college- and career-readiness benchmarks (SAT essay) (included in composite indicator, see above).	DE
		ACT score of 30 or SAT score of 1400 (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator, see above).	IL
		Minimum ACT subject scores of English—18—and reading—22 (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator, see above).	IL
		Minimum ACT subject scores of math—22—plus math in senior year (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator, see above).	IL
		Minimum SAT subject score of evidence-based reading and writing: 480 (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator, see above).	IL

(continues)

Description	Indicator	State-defined measures	State
Postsecondary entry exams <i>(continued)</i>	Performance on college entry exams, such as SAT or ACT <i>(continued)</i>	Minimum SAT subject score of math—530—plus math in senior year (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator, see above).	IL
		ACT/WorkKeys index with 20 levels of performance.*	LA
		Average ACT composite score.	NV
		ACT English score of 18 and math score of 21 (included in choice-ready framework, see above).	ND
		SAT reading and writing score of 480 and math score of 530 (included in choice-ready framework and composite indicator, see above).	ND, VT
		College Lab for English and Math/CREAM Pearson English—70 percent—and math—70 percent (included in choice-ready framework, see above).	ND
		Composite ACT score of 22 or higher (included in choice-ready framework, see above).	ND
		Composite ACT score of 21 (included in composite indicator, see above).	VT
		Composite indicator that includes percentage of students scoring 21 or higher on ACT.	TN
Career preparedness	Participation in CTE classes, job training, or workplace learning experiences	Percentage of students in grades 11 and 12 who participate in two courses in 1 of 17 CTE categories or two workplace experience courses.	CT
		Students earn points in college- and career-readiness indicator menu for completing well-defined work-based learning experience of at least 120 hours.	AZ
		Completing an approved cooperative education and/or work-based learning extension (included in composite indicator, see above).	DE
		Workplace learning experience (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator and in choice-ready framework, see above).	IL, ND
		Completion of a program of study (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator, see above).	IL
		Percentage of students in grades 11 and 12 successfully completing advanced coursework (dual enrollment, early middle college, CTE, AP, and IB).	MI
		Complete two credits in a coordinated plan of study (included in choice-ready framework, see above).	ND
	Earning an industry-recognized credential or certificate, or performance in CTE courses	Students earn points in college- and career-readiness indicator menu for earning an industry-recognized credential, certificate, or license.	AZ
		Students earn points in college- and career-readiness indicator menu for completing a CTE sequence and passing the state-specific technical skills assessment for that sequence.	AZ
		Students earn points in college- and career-readiness indicator menu for completing a CTE course sequence with an A, a B, or a C (outside of completed sequence referenced above).	AZ
		State department of education-approved industry credential (included in composite indicator, see above).	DE
		Postsecondary credit attainment with a B or higher within a state-approved program of study (included in composite indicator, see above).	DE
		College and Career Pathway Endorsement (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator, see above).	IL
		Industry-recognized credential (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator and in composite indicator, see above).	IL, VT
		Industry-aligned and state board-approved CTE credentials.	NV
		Dual Credit Career Pathway Course (A or B grade)—included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator, see above.	IL
		Advanced statewide CTE credential (included in strength-of-diploma index, see above).	LA
		Basic statewide CTE credential (included in strength-of-diploma index, see above).	LA
		Technical assessment/industry credential (included in choice-ready framework, see above).	ND
Career Ready Practice (3.0)—included in choice-ready framework, see above.	ND		
Composite indicator that includes percentage of students completing two EPSOs and earning industry certification.	TN		

(continues)

Description	Indicator	State-defined measures	State
Career preparedness <i>(continued)</i>	Summer employment	Consecutive summer employment (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator, see above).	IL
	Performance on ACT WorkKeys	Students earn points in college- and career-readiness indicator menu for meeting benchmarks for ACT WorkKeys.	AZ
		ACT/ACT WorkKeys index with 20 levels of performance.*	LA
		WorkKeys (Gold or Silver).	ND
	Performance on Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)	Students earn points in college- and career-readiness indicator menu for meeting benchmarks for ASVAB.	AZ
		ASVAB Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) score of 50 (included in composite indicator, see above).	DE
		ASVAB score of 31 or higher (included in choice-ready framework, see above).	ND
		ASVAB performance (depending on branch—minimum scores range from 31 to 36; included in composite indicator, see above).	VT
		Composite indicator that includes percentage of students completing two EPSOs and scoring a state-determined designated score on the ASVAB AFQT.	TN
	Postsecondary outcomes	Postsecondary enrollment	Schools earn a bonus point in college- and career-readiness indicator menu for increasing the percentage of postsecondary enrollment or 85 percent postsecondary enrollment and/or military enlistment.
Percentage of graduating class that enrolled in a two- or four-year postsecondary institution any time during the first year after high school graduation.			CT
Percentage of students enrolling in postsecondary education within key time points.			MI
College persistence (in consideration).			NM
College enrollment (included in summative indicator that counts the postsecondary outcomes of graduates divided by the number of graduates at 16 months after graduation).			VT
Trade school or workforce enrollment		Attaining and maintaining consistent employment for a minimum of 12 months (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator, see above).	IL
		Enrollment in trade schools and the workforce (included in summative indicator, see above).	VT
Military enrollment or service		Military service (including ROTC)—included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator, see above).	IL
		Military enlistment (included in summative indicator, see above).	VT
		Schools earn a bonus point in college- and career-readiness indicator menu for increasing the percentage of postsecondary enrollment or 85 percent postsecondary enrollment and/or military enlistment (same indicator as above).	AZ
Other postsecondary readiness measures	GPA	GPA of 3.75 to 4.0 (included as a requirement for one pathway in composite college- and career-readiness indicator, see above).	IL
		GPA of 2.8 to 4.0 (included as a requirement for one pathway in composite college- and career-readiness indicator, see above).	IL
		GPA of 2.8 or higher (included in choice-ready framework, see above).	ND
		GPA of 3.0 or higher in the core course requirements for university admission (included in choice-ready framework, see above).	ND
	High school diploma pathways	Students earn points in college- and career-readiness indicator menu for meeting all 16 Board of Regents program-of-study requirements	AZ
		Students earn points in college- and career-readiness indicator menu for earning a college- and career-readiness diploma or an IB diploma.	AZ
		High school diploma plus associate degree (included in strength-of-diploma index, see above).	LA
		High school diploma earned through pathway for students who take the LEAP Alternate Assessment Level 1 (included in strength-of-diploma index, see above).	LA
		Standard diplomas are worth a value of 1; college-endorsed or career-endorsed diplomas earn a value of 1.25.	NV

(continues)

Description	Indicator	State-defined measures	State
Other postsecondary readiness measures (continued)	Remedial courses	Earning an A, a B, or a C in college remedial English (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator), see above.	IL
		Earning an A, a B, or a C in college remedial math (included as an option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator), see above.	IL
		College remediation (in consideration).	NM
	Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)	Students earn points in college- and career-readiness indicator menu for completing the FAFSA.	AZ

***Correction, August 8, 2017:** Table 8 has been updated to include the accurate state-defined measures for postsecondary entry exams and career preparedness.

Source: Based on the author's review of the submitted consolidated state plans of 16 states and Washington, D.C., under the Every Student Succeeds Act. See U.S. Department of Education, "ESSA State Plan Submission," available at <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/statesubmission.html> (last accessed July 2017).

Enrichment and environment indicators

Thirteen states will include measures of academic enrichment or school environment in their school ratings, ranging from measures of a well-rounded education to school climate.¹⁹ For example, four states include a measure of physical fitness and three states include access to or participation in arts or music. Four states will use a student engagement or climate survey, which consider a range of school environment conditions such as teacher support and school safety. One state—Arizona—considers whether students with disabilities are included in general classrooms. Three states—in addition to the law's assessment requirements—use another cut of test score data such as improvement among subgroups of students, including those from low-income families, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and English language learners. These indicators, on average, are 11 percent of school ratings.²⁰

Additionally, ESSA requires states to annually test 95 percent of students in reading and math, to use the participation rate to calculate the achievement indicator, and to factor assessment participation into the statewide accountability system another way.²¹ For example, four states—Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Mexico, and Vermont—plan to lower a school's classification for not meeting this requirement.²² In three states—Illinois, Nevada, and Tennessee—schools that do not have a 95 percent participation rate cannot score at the highest level of proficiency; receive zero points for proficiency; or receive an F on the achievement indicator for the given group of students, respectively.²³

TABLE 9
Enrichment and environment indicators

Number of states	Weighting
6	0% through 10%
2	11% through 20%
1	21% through 30%
0	31% through 40%
0	41% through 50%

Note: Four states are excluded from this figure. Two states—Massachusetts and Tennessee—use enrichment and environment indicators (e.g., test participation) only for school ratings penalties. The weighting of Delaware's enrichment and environment indicators is not yet finalized, and Michigan will not weight its indicators.

Source: Data are based on author's analysis of ESSA state plans. See U.S. Department of Education, "ESSA State Plan Submission," available at <https://ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/statesubmission.html> (last accessed July 2017).

TABLE 10
Enrichment and environment indicators

First round, ESSA state plans

Description	Indicator	State-defined measures	States
Well-rounded education	Physical fitness	Percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards in all four areas of the state physical fitness assessment.	CT
		Amount of exposure to physical education.	MI
		Physically fit as deemed by physical education instructor (included in choice-ready framework, see college- and career-readiness indicators).	ND
		Student performance on physical fitness assessment.	VT
	Art	Percentage of students in grades 9 through 12 participating in at least one dance, theater, music, or visual arts course in the school year.	CT
		Participation in fine arts courses. (Note: This is weighted at 0 percent for the next four years.)	IL
		Amount of exposure students have to courses in the fine arts.	MI
	Music	Amount of exposure students have to music courses.	MI
	Multiliteracy	Certificate of multiliteracy (included in composite indicator, see college- and career-readiness indicators).	DE
	Cocurricular or extracurricular activities	Two or more organized cocurricular activities (included as option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator).	IL
		Two or more years in cocurricular or extracurricular activities (included in choice-ready framework, see above).	ND
	Learning plans	Percentage of middle school students with an academic learning plan.	NV
		Identify a career area of interest by end of sophomore year (included as a requirement for one pathway in composite college- and career-readiness indicator).	IL
		Rolling four-year education plan of study (included in choice-ready framework, see above).	ND
	Community service	25 hours of community service (included as option in composite college- and career-readiness indicator).	IL
Library media specialist	Access to a library media specialist.	MI	
Culture and climate	Climate survey	Student (grades 6 through 12), parent, teacher, and administrator participation in 5Essentials Survey. (Note: Participation will be used until the survey can be disaggregated by student demographic group.)	IL
		Student participation in climate survey.	NV
		Student (grades 3 through 11) responses to Opportunity to Learn survey.	NM
		Student engagement survey.	ND
	Re-enrollment	Percentage of students who are able and choose to re-enroll in the same school the following year.	D.C.
	Suspensions or expulsions	Zero expulsions or suspensions (included in choice-ready framework, see above).	ND
	Inclusion	Schools earn points in an acceleration menu if students spend at least 80 percent of their day in general education classroom.	AZ
	Pre-K	Program-level score on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, an observational tool that assesses the quality of pre-K classroom interactions.	D.C.

(continues)

Description	Indicator	State-defined measures	States
Other assessment measures	Accelerating in coursework or meeting performance benchmarks	Schools earn points in an acceleration menu for increasing the percentage of students in grades 5 through 8 accelerating in end-of-course math.	AZ
		Students earn points in college- and career-readiness indicator menu for a passing score on algebra 2 or English language arts 11.	AZ
		Percentage of students achieving college- and career-readiness status on the math, science, or English language arts end-of-course exams.	NV
		State assessment English 3 and math 3 (included in choice-ready framework, see above).	ND
	Third-grade reading	Schools earn points in an acceleration menu for decreasing percentage of minimally proficient third-graders.	AZ
	Subgroup improvement	Schools earn points in an acceleration menu for improving the performance of student subgroups (the school's current year weighted, stable proficiency compared with the prior year weighted, stable state average for the subgroup).	AZ
	Test participation	Schools in the top two categories will be lowered a category if the participation rate on the state summative assessment in any subject for either the all-students group or the high-needs group is less than 95 percent.	CT
		Schools that do not have a 95 percent participation rate cannot score at the highest level of proficiency.	IL
		General participation and English-language learner participation will be included as a school classification indicator.	MI
		Schools that do not meet assessment participation requirements are eligible to move down a level on the performance scale.	MA
		Three levels of participation rate penalties for schools that test fewer than 95 percent of their eligible student population: participation warning (displayed with index score and star rating); participation penalty (status indicator reduced by significant number of points); and continuing participation penalty (schools earn zero points for the proficiency indicator).	NV
		Schools that fail to test 95 percent of students in English language arts or math will have their overall letter grade reduced by one letter.	NM
		Schools will receive an F on the achievement indicator for any group of students that does not meet the 95 percent participation rate.	TN
If a school has lower than 95 percent participation, the school's rating will be lowered by multiplying its preliminary score by the percentage of eligible students participating in the assessment.	VT		

Source: Based on the author's review of the submitted consolidated state plans of 16 states and Washington, D.C., under the Every Student Succeeds Act. See U.S. Department of Education, "ESSA State Plan Submission," available at <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/statesubmission.html> (last accessed July 2017).

Indicator analysis

ESSA requires that states give “substantial weight” to achievement, the second academic indicator, graduation rates, and ELP and “much greater weight” to those measures in the aggregate compared with school quality or student success indicators.²⁴ States’ interpretations of this requirement vary and may depend on how they label the indicators in their school classification systems.

For example, some states do not label any school classification indicators in their ESSA plans with the term “school quality or student success.” Some states label some, but not all, of the indicators that qualify as measures of school quality or student success with this term. Other states include measures of school quality or student success within other indicators, such as the achievement indicator. The analysis in this brief considers all measures that qualify as measures of school quality or student success under ESSA—regardless of state plan organization or labeling—as this type of indicator.

For example, in its initial submitted state plan, Washington, D.C., includes performance on the SAT or ACT and participation in and performance on Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate exams in its achievement indicator. Nevada’s state plan, on the other hand, refers to its measures of college and career readiness and student engagement as “other indicators.” This analysis categorizes both sets of indicators as measures of school quality or student success.²⁵

On the other hand, in order to comply with ESSA, states may use additional academic subjects such as science and social studies as the second academic indicator for elementary and middle schools, or as an indicator of school quality or student success for any schools, according to initial feedback from the Education Department.²⁶ The analysis in this brief excludes these measures when identifying and weighting measures of school quality or student success.

On average, states include school quality or student success indicators as approximately 14 percent of elementary and middle school ratings and 26 percent of high school ratings.²⁷ Prior to ESSA, these types of indicators similarly averaged around 20 percent of school classification systems.²⁸ Notably, two plans—Washington, D.C.’s and North Dakota’s—include measures of school quality or student success as more than 50 percent of high school ratings.²⁹ The bulk of these measures are college- and career-readiness indicators, such as performance on the SAT, ACT, or ACT WorkKeys; participation or performance in advanced coursework; and earning industry-recognized credentials.

Additionally, of the 17 submitted plans in this review, the majority of states are using new or different indicators compared with their systems prior to ESSA’s passage. For example, 11 additional states are using chronic absenteeism and seven more states use measures of college and career readiness. In addition, seven more states are using enrichment or environment indicators, such as measures of a well-rounded education. States have also introduced new indicators, such as re-enrollment, certificates of multiliteracy, participation in summer employment, and completion of the Free Application for Free Student Aid. One plan—Washington, D.C.’s—includes a measure of pre-K classroom quality.³⁰

Considerations

States should keep several considerations in mind as they prepare to submit their plans to the Education Department for review or revise their plans based on initial department feedback. States may refer to the analyses in this brief as points of reference for indicators or weightings, in addition to the recommendations below.

Simple systems

States should create clear and simple classification systems. Parents, teachers, school leaders, and others need to be able to understand why their school receives a certain rating and what it would need to do to improve. Including too many indicators may overcomplicate ratings and dilute the amount of attention that the measures receive. ESSA allows states to use more than one measure of school quality or student success, which may give schools a greater opportunity to demonstrate school performance. But including a dozen indicators or complex indices may make it difficult for schools to know what to focus on, and each individual indicator may lose relevance.

The classification determinations required under the law, however, are only a small part of an effective accountability system.³¹ Additional indicators can and should be used to drive a system of continuous improvement at the state, district, and school levels. Some states are developing data dashboards with a broad array of data points designed to inform improvement efforts at every level of the system.

Discrete indicators

States should avoid using measures of school quality or student success in other school classification indicators. For example, some state plans include measures of college and career readiness—such as participation in advanced coursework—in the achievement indicator or in the graduation rate indicator. The law requires that these measures be used in a distinct school quality or student success indicator; using these measures in other indicators may make it more difficult for parents to understand which indicators are being used and the respective weight given to them.

Weighting requirements

States should think critically about how to comply with the law's weighting requirements. The law requires that school classification systems lean heavily toward the academic indicators, compared with the measures of school quality or student success. Having clearly defined indicators will help states comply with this requirement so that nonacademic indicators don't mask low performance on academic outcome measures.

Again, states can use these classification systems to zero in on the areas that need the greatest attention, but they can and should think more expansively about how to use a broad array of measures to support schools' improvement efforts and provide parents with a fuller picture of school quality.

Disaggregated data

ESSA requires states to be able to disaggregate—or report results by each student group—all measures in their school classification systems, excluding progress toward ELP. Accordingly, states must ensure that they can disaggregate their new measures of school quality or student success to use them for school ratings. Until they can be broken down by student group, these measures will be better suited for public reporting and school improvement.

Supporting all students

States should consider whether their measures of school quality or student success support all students. For example, many states have explored measures of college and career readiness at the high school level, but few have adopted measures of early learning to support younger students toward this goal. States may use different indicators for each grade span, which gives them the opportunity to be inclusive of all grades.

Continuous improvement

States should continue to update and improve on their plans after they submit them to the Education Department. ESSA gives states the flexibility to add new measures to their school classification systems over time. As a result, states should consider including additional indicators of interest once they have collected data for several years and confirmed that new instruments, such as climate surveys, are valid, reliable, and can be disaggregated for all student groups.

Comprehensive data dashboards

States should publicly report performance on additional indicators they use to measure school performance, not just those required for school classification under the law. These classifications are just one small part of effective accountability systems. A broad array of indicators of student and school success—that may not be appropriate to include in the classification system—can and should be used to inform improvement supports. Furthermore, some states are considering keeping the classification determinations focused on schools identified for intervention, rather than using them to rate or grade all schools. Additional data can be catalogued in comprehensive data dashboards for use by parents and district and school personnel for planning school improvement strategies.

Conclusion

States have a world of opportunity as they redesign school classification systems under ESSA. But carefully choosing which new measures of school quality or student success to use is no small task. These measures should align with states' long-term goals and signal their priorities, which require the time and attention of districts and schools.

The first 17 plans submitted to the Department of Education include a variety of measures, from chronic absenteeism and SAT performance to summer employment. These states can continue to improve their systems as new data become available, and states that have yet to submit their plans to the department can learn from the breadth and depth of new measures included in first-round plans.

Appendix A: Methodology

The author analyzed the ESSA plans that 16 states and Washington, D.C., submitted to the Department of Education, including updated plans, as of August 1, 2017.³² The analysis organizes the new measures of school quality or student success that states use in their school classification systems into four categories: early warning; persistence, other than four-year or extended-year graduation rates; college and career readiness; and enrichment and environment indicators. Some state systems use multiple measures in one indicator, index, or menu of options. This analysis considers each measure in these composite indicators as its own indicator. As a result, the analysis may reflect more indicators than how a state describes its system. This analysis may also categorize measures in ways that are different than state ESSA plan descriptions.

This brief also explores how much measures of school quality or student success contribute to school ratings. Weightings for each category were calculated based on the total points or percentage points a school can earn for each indicator, or the relative weighting of each indicator if a system did not use a performance index. For states that described two phases of indicator weighting, the analysis used the weightings in their second phase.

The ranges and averages for the early warning and enrichment and environment indicator categories include weightings for elementary, middle, and high schools. The ranges and averages for the persistence and college- and career-readiness indicators categories include high schools only. Averages do not include data from states that do not include or weight indicators in a respective category. Additionally, it was not always possible to unpack the weightings of measures that states include in composite indicators.

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***Correction, August 8, 2017:** Table 8 has been updated to include the accurate state-defined measures for postsecondary entry exams and career preparedness.

Endnotes

- 1 *Every Student Succeeds Act*, Public Law 114–95, 114th Cong., 1st sess. (December 10, 2015).
- 2 U.S. Department of Education, *ESEA Flexibility* (2012), available at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/eseaflex/approved-requests/flexrequest.doc>.
- 3 U.S. Department of Education, “Key Policy Letters Signed by the Education Secretary or Deputy Secretary,” February 10, 2017, available at <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/170210.html>.
- 4 This analysis models the framework laid out in a previous CAP accountability analysis. This organization allows for cross-state comparisons and a comprehensive understanding of accountability measures. “Other” indicators are renamed “enrichment and environment” indicators in this brief. See Carmel Martin, Scott Sargrad, and Samantha Batel, “Making the Grade: A 50-State Analysis of School Accountability Systems” (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2016), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/reports/2016/05/19/137444/making-the-grade/>.
- 5 New Mexico will transition to new school classification indicators in the 2018–19 school year. This analysis excludes the measures that the state intends to phase out and includes the measures that the state will put in place.
- 6 The 17 states referenced throughout this brief refer to 16 states and Washington, D.C., which is counted as a state when state totals are provided.
- 7 Michigan’s submitted ESSA plan proposed three accountability systems: an A–F system, a system that assigns A–F grades to each indicator, and a dashboard system with no summative rating. The Michigan Department of Education announced that it will use the dashboard system. The analysis in this brief includes the indicators that Michigan proposed in its submitted ESSA plan and counts Michigan in state totals where applicable. It excludes Michigan from all weighting calculations. See Jennifer Guerra, “Michigan dumps its school ranking system in favor of dashboard,” Michigan Radio, July 23, 2017, available at <http://michiganradio.org/post/michigan-dumps-its-school-ranking-system-favor-dashboard>.
- 8 Based on author’s analysis of the 17 submitted ESSA plans. See U.S. Department of Education, “ESSA State Plan Submission,” available at <https://ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/statesubmission.html> (last accessed July 2017). Four states are excluded from this average. The weighting of Arizona and North Dakota’s early warning indicators could not be unpacked from another category of indicators. The weighting of Delaware’s early warning indicators is not yet finalized, and Michigan will not weight its indicators.
- 9 Connecticut State Department of Education, *Connecticut Consolidated State Plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act* (U.S. State Department of Education, 2017) available at http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/essa/july_17_2017_ct_revised_consolidated_state_essa_plan.pdf.
- 10 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Massachusetts Consolidated State Plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), April 2017* (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), available at <https://ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/macsa2017.pdf>; personal communication with Robert Curtin, assistant commissioner of data and accountability, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, July 31, 2017.
- 11 Illinois State Board of Education, *State Template for the Consolidated State Plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), available at <https://ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/ilcsa2017.pdf>.
- 12 Based on author’s analysis of the 17 submitted ESSA plans. See U.S. Department of Education, “ESSA State Plan Submission.” One state—Louisiana—is excluded from this average, because the weighting of its persistence indicators cannot be unpacked from the weighting of its college- and career-readiness indicators.
- 13 Oregon Department of Education, *Oregon’s Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), available at <https://ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/orcsa2017.pdf>.
- 14 One state—New Mexico—is refining the definition of its college- and career-readiness indicators.
- 15 Based on author’s analysis of the 17 submitted ESSA plans. See U.S. Department of Education, “ESSA State Plan Submission.” Two states are excluded from this average. The weighting of Delaware’s college- and career-readiness indicators is not yet finalized, and Michigan will not weight its indicators.
- 16 Arizona Department of Education, *Revised State Template for the Consolidated State Plan: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), available at <https://ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/azcsa2017.pdf>.
- 17 Louisiana Department of Education, *Louisiana Believes: Louisiana’s Elementary and Secondary Education Plan Pursuant to the Federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), available at <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/louisianabelieves/louisianas-essa-state-plan.pdf?sfvrsn=22>.
- 18 North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, *North Dakota Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) State Plan* (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), available at <https://ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/ndcsa2017.pdf>.
- 19 Louisiana and Washington, D.C., are developing indicators that will measure whether schools are providing students with access to a well-rounded education.
- 20 Based on author’s analysis of the 17 submitted ESSA plans. See U.S. Department of Education, “ESSA State Plan Submission.” Four states are excluded from this average. Two states—Massachusetts and Tennessee—use enrichment and environment indicators (e.g., test participation) only for school ratings penalties. The weighting of Delaware’s enrichment and environment indicators is not yet finalized, and Michigan will not weight its indicators.
- 21 *Every Student Succeeds Act*.
- 22 Connecticut State Department of Education, *Connecticut Consolidated State Plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act*; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Massachusetts Consolidated State Plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*; New Mexico Public Department of Education, *New Mexico Rising: New Mexico’s State Plan For the Every Student Succeeds Act*; Vermont Agency of Education, *Revised State Template for the Consolidated State Plan: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), available at <https://ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/vtcsa2017.pdf>.
- 23 Illinois State Board of Education, *State Template for the Consolidated State Plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act*; Nevada Department of Education, *Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), available at <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/map/nv.html>; Tennessee Department of Education, “Every Student Succeeds Act: Building on Success in Tennessee, ESSA State Plan” (2017), available at https://www.tn.gov/assets/entities/education/attachments/ESSA_state_plan.pdf.
- 24 *Every Student Succeeds Act*.
- 25 Nevada Department of Education, “Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act”; Office of the State Superintendent of Education, *District of Columbia Revised State Template for the Consolidated State Plan: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), available at <https://ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/dccsa2017.pdf>.

- 26 See, for example, the letter from Jason Batel to John White, June 30, 2017, available at <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/laorprelimdetermltr.pdf>.
- 27 Based on author's analysis of the 17 submitted ESSA plans. See U.S. Department of Education, "ESSA State Plan Submission." Delaware and Michigan are excluded from these averages. The weighting of Delaware's school quality or student success indicators, as defined in this brief, is not yet finalized, and Michigan will not weight its indicators.
- 28 Based on analysis from previous report. See Martin, Sargrad, and Batel, "Making the Grade."
- 29 Based on author's analysis of the 17 submitted ESSA plans. See U.S. Department of Education, "ESSA State Plan Submission."
- 30 Office of the State Superintendent of Education, *District of Columbia Revised State Template for the Consolidated State Plan: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act*.
- 31 Laura Jimenez and Scott Sargrad, "A New Vision for School Accountability" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2017), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/reports/2017/03/03/427156/a-new-vision-for-school-accountability/>.
- 32 U.S. Department of Education, "ESSA State Plan Submission."