

# Every Student Succeeds Act Primer: Teachers and School Leaders

December 2015



Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, states and districts are responsible for improving the quality and effectiveness of teachers, principals, and other school leaders in increasing student academic achievement.

**Eliminates “highly qualified teacher” requirement.** ESSA eliminates the highly qualified teacher (HQT) provision that existed under the No Child Left Behind Act requiring that students from low-income families and students of color not be taught by ineffective, inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers at higher rates than their peers. The bill does not set a minimum bar of entry into the teaching profession.

**Student access to effective teaching.** ESSA replaces the HQT provision with the following requirements:

- School districts must describe how they will identify and address any disparities that result in students from low-income families and students of color being taught by ineffective, inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers at higher rates than other students.\*
- States must collect and publicly report data on these disparities.\*
- State plans must describe how students from low-income families and students of color will not be served at disproportionate rates by ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers.\*
- School districts must have mechanisms to notify parents regarding the professional qualifications of their child’s teacher.
- States may use federal professional development funds to increase access to effective teachers for students from low-income families and students of color.

\* Does not apply to students with disabilities and English language learners.

**Professional development.** ESSA slightly decreases federal funding for professional development activities. For Fiscal Year 2015, the U.S. Congress appropriated \$2.35 billion for these activities, while ESSA sets the authorization level at \$2.30 billion. ESSA authorizes federal funding for states and school districts to provide professional development activities that support improving teacher and school leader effectiveness. These activities include reforming teacher/leader certification requirements (including ensuring that teachers have the necessary subject-matter knowledge and teaching skills and may include a teacher performance assessment); induction, residency, and mentoring programs; and efforts to increase recruitment and retention, such as career ladders. States may use professional development funding for leaders to develop the instructional leadership skills necessary for teachers to teach to the state standards and help students meet those standards. This may include supporting teachers in using data and assessments to improve classroom practice; developing and implementing instructional practices that support dual or concurrent enrollment programs; and integrating rigorous academics, career and technical education, and work-based learning, such as using common planning time to help prepare students for postsecondary education and the workforce.

**Teacher and leader evaluations.** States may use federal professional development funds to implement teacher and leader evaluation systems based on student achievement, growth, and multiple measures of performance and to inform professional development; however, states are not required to implement such systems.

Policy	No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)	Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Waivers	Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
Requires equitable distribution of highly qualified teachers	Yes	Yes	No
Requires teacher and leader evaluation systems	No	Yes	No

# Every Student Succeeds Act Primer: Assessments

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The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 supports states in implementing high-quality assessments by providing new assessment flexibility, funding, and a new pilot program. These new policies will support teachers in using assessments to foster deeper learning among students, including the ability to master core academic content, think critically and solve complex problems, and communicate effectively.

**Annual statewide assessments.** ESSA requires states to administer an annual assessment of students in grades three through eight, and once in high school, in math and English/language arts.

**New assessment flexibility.** ESSA includes several provisions intended to strengthen the quality of state assessments:

- Assessments may be delivered, in part, in the form of projects, portfolios, and extended-performance tasks.
- In high schools, districts may implement nationally recognized assessments that meet state and federal technical standards and are approved by "peer review" and the state.
- States may, but are not required to, set a target limit on the aggregate amount of time spent on assessment administration.

**Funding.** ESSA maintains federal funding to support state assessments, authorizing up to \$378 million annually. States may use these funds to develop and implement the annual assessments required under the law. In addition, states and districts may use funds to develop balanced assessment systems (i.e., formative, interim, and summative assessments) and competency-based assessments. Furthermore, states may use federal funds to conduct assessment audits of state and district assessments to ensure they are necessary and of high quality.

**Innovative assessment pilot.** ESSA allows up to seven states, and a consortia not to exceed four states, to implement an innovative assessment and accountability pilot. This pilot may include the use of competency- or performance-based assessments for accountability purposes, and removes the requirement for annual statewide assessments to be used for accountability purposes.

**Opt-out.** At least 95 percent of students and 95 percent of each group of traditionally underserved students must be assessed. This provision aims to ensure that students will participate in annual statewide assessments.

Policy	No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)	Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Waivers	Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
Requires annual statewide assessments	Yes	Yes	Yes
Includes an innovative assessment pilot	No	Limited (New Hampshire received approval for innovative assessments.)	Yes

# Every Student Succeeds Act Primer:

## Accountability

December 2015



**Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, states are accountable for focusing resources on low-performing schools and traditionally underserved students who consistently demonstrate low academic performance.**

**State goals and accountability systems.** States are required to establish long-term goals for, at minimum, student achievement, high school graduation rates, and English language proficiency with measurements of interim progress. States also must establish multiple-measure accountability systems that include

- student scores on annual assessments and, at the state's discretion, for high schools also may include student growth based on annual assessments in addition to students' annual assessment scores;
- English language proficiency;
- at least one indicator of school quality or success that allows for meaningful differentiation among student performance;
- for elementary and middle schools, a "measure of student growth" or other academic indicator that allows for meaningful differentiation in student performance; and
- for high schools, graduation rates.

**Comprehensive support and improvement schools.** Schools are identified for comprehensive support and improvement based on the performance of all students. At least once every three years, states must identify the lowest-performing 5 percent of Title I schools and high schools with graduation rates at or below 67 percent for comprehensive, locally-determined, evidence-based intervention. These schools have up to four years to meet state-set criteria that would allow them to exit the comprehensive support and improvement status. If the schools do not meet these criteria, they must implement more rigorous state-determined interventions. In addition, districts may allow students in these schools to transfer to other public schools in the district.

**Targeted support and improvement schools.** Schools are identified for targeted support and intervention based on the performance of student subgroups. Annually, states must identify any school with any student subgroup that is consistently underperforming based on all indicators in the state accountability system. Those schools must receive targeted, locally-determined, evidence-based intervention. If implementation of targeted interventions is unsuccessful in improving student outcomes based on the indicators in the state accountability system, additional action may be taken after a number of years to be determined by the district.

**Other support and improvement schools.** A school with a student subgroup performing at the level of the lowest-performing 5 percent of all Title I-receiving schools, based on the state accountability system, must receive targeted support. That school also must identify resource inequities to address through the implementation of its improvement plan. If these schools do not reach state-set criteria for exiting targeted-support status within a state-set time period, the school will be identified for comprehensive support and improvement.

**School improvement funding.** States must use 7 percent of their Title I allocations for school improvement activities. States may use 3 percent of their Title I allocations for "direct student services," including Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and other advanced course work; career and technical education that leads to an industry-recognized credential; credit recovery; and personalized learning.

Policy	No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)	Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Waivers	Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
Requires accountability based on adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward the goal of having 100 percent of students reach proficiency in math and English	Yes	No	No
Requires state accountability system with more than two indicators	No	Permits	Yes
Requires federally-determined interventions in low-performing schools	Yes (i.e., school choice and supplemental educational services)	Yes (within the lowest-performing 5 percent of Title I schools and high schools with a graduation rate below 60 percent)	No

# Every Student Succeeds Act Primer: High Schools

December 2015



**Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, states and districts are responsible for supporting and improving the quality of low-performing high schools.**

**High school graduation rate goals.** For all students and student subgroups, states must set long-term goals for the four-year high school graduation rate with measurements of interim progress. States may set goals for extended-year graduation rates (e.g., five-year or six-year graduation rate), but these goals must be higher than the four-year graduation rate goal.

**Low-graduation-rate high schools.** At least once every three years, states must identify high schools with graduation rates at or below 67 percent for comprehensive, locally-determined, evidence-based intervention. These schools have up to four years to meet state-set criteria that would allow them to exit the comprehensive support and improvement status. If these schools do not meet these criteria they must implement more rigorous state-determined interventions. In addition, districts may allow students in these schools to transfer to other public schools in the district.

**Funding for high schools.** Currently, high schools receive 10 percent of Title I funding; however, they enroll nearly one-quarter of students from low-income families.<sup>1</sup> In addition, there are 3,102 high schools that have a poverty rate of at least 50 percent, yet they do not receive Title I funds.<sup>2</sup> To address this inequity, ESSA allows districts to target Title I funds to high schools. Districts are allowed to lower the priority threshold to receive Title I funds from 75 percent to 50 percent for high schools. The priority threshold to receive Title I funds remains at 75 percent for elementary and middle schools.

**School improvement funding.** ESSA eliminates the School Improvement Grants program. However, it requires states to utilize 7 percent of their Title I funds to support school improvement activities. In addition, states may use 3 percent of their Title I funding to provide “direct student services,” which may include Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and other advanced course work; career and technical education that leads to an industry-recognized credential; credit recovery; and personalized learning.

**High school program.** ESSA eliminates the High School Graduation Initiative (HSGI) included in the No Child Left Behind Act. HSGI was the only program dedicated to high school dropout prevention and recovery. However, ESSA creates a new grant program for states and districts called the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant program. Funds from this new program may be used for dropout prevention as well as a variety of other activities related to supporting a well-rounded education, improving school conditions, and digital literacy.

**State and district plans.** State plans must describe how the state will work with districts to provide for the effective transition of students from middle school to high school and from high school to postsecondary education. Strategies for doing so may include integrating rigorous academics, career and technical education, and work-based learning; dual enrollment; and coordination with institutions of higher education and employers. In addition, district plans may use Title I funds to support experiential and work-based learning opportunities that provide students with in-depth interactions with industry professionals and academic credit. Plans also may support dual enrollment, early college high schools, and career counseling.

Policy	No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)	Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Waivers	Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
Requires intervention in low-graduation-rate high schools	No	Yes (within high schools with a graduation rate below 60 percent)	Yes (within high schools with a graduation rate at or below 67 percent)
Includes a program dedicated to dropout prevention and recovery	Yes	Yes (HSGI was maintained under waivers.)	No

<sup>1</sup> J. Chambers et al., *State and Local Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, Volume IV—Targeting the Uses of Federal Education Funds* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2009), p. 49, <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/disadv/nclb-targeting/nclb-targeting.pdf> (accessed September 28, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Alliance for Excellent Education unpublished analysis of Title I data from the Common Core of Data, National Center for Education Statistics, School Year 2012–13.