

STATE PLAN CONSIDERATIONS: STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENT

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) presents various opportunities for state education agencies (SEAs) to rethink how they best serve students, by providing new flexibility from federal constraints. States have already committed to establishing or adopting high-quality systems of assessments, including both formative and summative assessments, based on college- and career-ready (CCR) standards. These assessments will align to CCR standards, report annually on each student's progress toward readiness, adhere to best test administration practices, and be accessible to all students.

It is important for state and district leaders to consider how to leverage the opportunities presented by the new flexibility in the law to achieve the state strategic vision and priorities. With much of the decision-making now in the hands of state and districts, there is increased freedom to determine innovative solutions to drive reform in critical content areas. Key components and questions you may want to consider in this issue area are provided below.

Key Considerations in Standards and Assessment

For assessment, ESSA requires:	Implications/Questions
<p>Alignment with higher education. All assessments and standards must be "aligned with challenging state academic standards" that correlate to entrance requirements for credit-bearing coursework in the state's public higher education system and to relevant career and technical education standards.</p>	
<p>Annual assessments. States must continue to test all students on statewide assessments in the following areas: reading/language arts and math every year in grades 3-8 and once in high school (9-12); and science once in each grade span (3-5, 6-9, 10-12). These assessments must be aligned to the state's challenging academic standards.</p>	<p><i>Implications:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because this requirement is not new, many states will be familiar with this construct and with the process by which the U.S. Department of Education (USED) reviews state assessments, the assessment peer review process. For many states, current state tests may meet this requirement. States that are not changing assessments in 2015-2016 will go through USED's peer review process in April or June of 2016.

For assessment, ESSA requires:	Implications/Questions
<p>Annual assessments. <i>(Continued.)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As noted below, states also will have new options in terms of the types of assessments that constitute their annual summative assessments. As the types of assessments evolve, it is anticipated that this same level of review will be applied to the potential use of new forms of assessments such as portfolio- based or performance- based, which ESSA enables. (Please see <i>Alternate Formats</i> below.) <p><i>Question:</i> What role do statewide assessments play in your comprehensive system of high-quality assessments?</p>
<p>Disaggregation. Disaggregation of assessment results by student subgroups continues to be required.</p>	<p><i>Implications:</i> State test results must continue to be disaggregated for reporting purposes. Because state report cards will need to include disaggregation for three additional subgroups (homeless students, foster care students, and military-connected students), state assessment systems also will need to enable disaggregation for those subgroups, in addition to the ones required in the past.</p> <p><i>Question:</i> How should your state analyze its assessment data to set short- and long-term goals for all subgroups?</p>

For assessment, ESSA requires:	Implications/Questions
<p>Alternate Assessments. An alternate assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities is required. This assessment must be based on alternate academic achievement standards aligned with challenging State academic standards and, unless a waiver is granted, is subject to a 1% student participation cap for each required subject. NOTE: ESSA indicates that states “may” develop an alternate assessment, but this remains a requirement under IDEA.</p> <p>From IDEA: “A State (or, in the case of a district-wide assessment, an LEA) must develop and implement alternate assessments and guidelines for the participation of children with disabilities in alternate assessments for those children who cannot participate in regular assessments, even with accommodations, as indicated in their respective IEPs.”</p>	<p>Implications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While states are not allowed to test more than 1% of the student population with the alternate assessment, they are still required to determine how they will provide additional oversight over LEAs that administer these assessments, should they be assessing more than 1% of their total student population via these assessments. • The state cannot impose a local cap on participation, but an LEA exceeding the cap must submit information to the State justifying the need to exceed the cap. • As part of the IEP process, parents must be clearly informed that their child’s achievement being measured on alternate achievement standards, and “how participation in such assessments may delay or otherwise affect the student from completing the requirements for a regular high school diploma.” However, this “does not preclude a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities who takes an alternate assessment ... from attempting to complete the requirements for a regular high school diploma.” <p>Question: What is your state’s strategy for coordinating this cap across the state?</p>

For assessment, ESSA requires:	Implications/Questions
<p>Participation rate. ESSA requires a 95% participation rate of all students and student subgroups in the state assessment program.</p>	<p><i>Implications:</i> Although ESSA requires that participation rate be taken into account as part of a state's accountability system, it does not specify how the 95% criteria should be applied. Unless USED regulates on this issue, it will be up to states to decide the consequences for non-participation.</p> <p><i>Questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What incentives should your state create to drive participation rates? • How should your state build those into your accountability system?

For assessment, ESSA requires:	Implications/Questions
<p>English Language Proficiency (ELP)</p> <p>Assessment. A statewide test of acquisition of English proficiency for English Language Learners is required. This test must be aligned to the state's ELP standards.</p>	<p><i>Implications:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States will need to determine if their ELP assessments align with their ELP standards, and revise those assessments if they do not. In addition, the ELP standards must be aligned to the state's academic standards. There are several options about how to transition these scores into the state accountability system. • In addition to ELP assessments, ESSA continues the requirement that states' reading/language arts, math and science assessments provide for the inclusion of English Learners (ELs), who must be assessed in a valid and reliable manner and provided appropriate accommodations (including, to the extent practicable, assessments in the language and form most likely to yield accurate information on what those students know and can do in the content area assessed) until they have attained English proficiency as measured by the ELP assessments administered in the state. <p><i>Questions:</i></p> <p>What is your state's overall assessment strategy for EL students? How does that impact your accountability system?</p>

In addition, ESSA <i>allows</i> for the following:	Implications/Questions
Alternate formats. Assessments <i>may</i> “be partially delivered in the form of portfolios, projects, or extended performance tasks.”	
Single summative or multiple interim. States <i>may</i> decide if assessments will be administered through a single summative assessment or “through multiple statewide interim assessments during the course of the academic year that result in a single summative score that provides valid, reliable, and transparent information on student achievement or growth.”	<p><i>Implications:</i></p> <p>Assessments may be administered through a single summative assessment or via multiple statewide interim assessments during the course of the academic year that result in a single summative score. Regardless of the format, the assessments must meet the same standards for technical quality.</p>
<p>8th grade assessments. States <i>may</i> decide if they will exempt 8th graders who take advanced mathematics in middle school from the regular 8th grade state assessment.</p>	<p><i>Implications:</i></p> <p>Under ESSA, this allowance is limited to 8th grade math, although under waivers some states had similar alternatives for students taking high school English tests in the 8th grade in place of state-developed 8th grade tests. Under this provision, the 8th grade advanced math scores must still be included in the accountability system.</p> <p><i>Questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What impact will this decision have on your high school assessment? • How will you assess these students in high schools?

In addition, ESSA <i>allows</i> for the following:	Implications/Questions
<p>Locally selected, nationally recognized assessments. States may decide to make nationally recognized high school assessments available for local selection. If any district seeks to use a locally selected assessment, states are required to establish technical criteria to determine if any such assessments meet the requirement.</p>	<p><i>Implications:</i></p> <p>States can choose to let districts give a nationally recognized assessment — like the SAT or ACT — in place of the statewide high school assessment. Under this provision, the state has to make sure that the nationally recognized assessment is aligned to state standards, meets the same technical quality requirements as the state assessment, and generates information that is comparable to the information generated by the state test. The test scores also would need to be used in the state's accountability system.</p> <p><i>Questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will these tests be factored into your state accountability system? • What impact will this have on your overall assessment system?
<p>Computer-adaptive assessments. States may decide if they want to develop and administer computer- adaptive assessments.</p>	<p><i>Questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does this allow students on both ends of the performance scale to better demonstrate learning? • What safeguards should your state put in place to ensure all students are progressing toward high standards? • What procedures should your state put in place to ensure the technical quality and comparability of the nationally recognized tests?

In addition, ESSA <i>allows</i> for the following:	Implications/Questions
<p>Assessment audit. States may choose to seek additional funds from the U.S. Secretary of Education to conduct an audit of their assessment system.</p>	<p><i>Implications:</i></p> <p>States will need to decide if they will seek additional funds from the Secretary to conduct an audit of their assessment system. A state that receives an audit grant will have to provide at least 20% of that grant to LEAs. Interested states should begin thinking about the procedures they will put in place for local subgrants.</p> <p><i>Questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key elements of a high-quality system of assessments that can best and most efficiently advance college and career ready teaching and learning? • What current assessments are being administered at all levels and which, if any, can be eliminated or reduced because they are low-quality, duplicative, and/or do not serve a core purpose as part of a comprehensive, high-quality system of assessments? • What can and should be done to enhance the system of assessments to improve quality and build a more comprehensive system that can best measure the full range of knowledge and skills, improve teaching, and advance growth of all students toward college and career ready outcomes?
<p>Cap on testing time. States <i>may</i> set a limit on the aggregate amount of time devoted to the administration of assessments for each grade, expressed as a percentage of annual instructional hours. States need to determine when they would make this decision.</p>	<p><i>Questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do the results of an assessment audit inform your decision about a possible cap on testing time? • How is quality of assessment taken into consideration as part of this analysis?