

EDUCATION WEEK

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ESSA in a Nutshell: Highlights and Takeaways

The Every Student Succeeds Act—the latest revision of the nation's main K-12 law and successor to the No Child Left Behind Act—takes full effect in the 2017-18 school year. Among its key elements:

Accountability Plans

- States devise their own plans, to be approved by the U.S. Department of Education, effective in 2017-18. States set goals that must address testing and English-language proficiency, and graduation rates, and which aim to close achievement and graduation gaps.

Accountability Systems

Elementary and Middle Schools

- Must contain three academic indicators: proficiency on state tests, English-language proficiency, and an academic factor that can be broken out by subgroup, such as growth on state tests.
- Must include at least one indicator of school quality, such as student engagement, postsecondary readiness, or school climate/safety.

High Schools

- Essentially the same indicators, with graduation rates as part of the mix.

Low-Performing Schools

- States identify and intervene in the bottom 5 percent of performers, and high schools where the graduation rate is 67 percent or less.
- States, with districts, identify schools where subgroups of students are struggling.
- States can set aside up to 7 percent of their Title I funds for school improvement.

Testing

- States test students in reading and math in grades 3-8 and once in high school, and break out the data for whole schools, plus different subgroups of students (English-learners, students

in special education, racial minorities, those in poverty). Minimum participation rate of 95 percent required on state tests.

- Districts can use nationally recognized tests at the high school level instead of state assessments, with state permission, such as the SAT or ACT.
- States can create their own testing opt-out laws, and states decide what should happen in schools that miss targets.

Standards

- States must adopt “challenging” academic standards. The U.S. secretary of education is barred from forcing or encouraging states to pick a particular set of standards.

Teachers

- Elimination of NCLB's “highly qualified” teacher requirement and the NCLB waiver requirement for teacher evaluation through student outcomes.

Transition From NCLB

- Waivers from the NCLB law are null and void on Aug. 1, 2016, but states must continue supporting their lowest-performing schools (“priority schools”) and schools with big achievement gaps (“focus schools”) until their new ESSA accountability plans kick in.

English-Language Learners

- Accountability moves from Title III (the English-language-acquisition section of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) to Title I. English-learners' test scores will be phased in for school accountability purposes over their first three years in U.S. schools.

Students in Special Education

- Only 1 percent of students overall can be given alternative tests, which amounts to about 10 percent of students in special education.

Programs

Block Grant

- A new \$1.6 billion block grant will consolidate dozens of programs, including some involving physical education, Advanced Placement, school counseling, and education technology.

New or Existing

- The Preschool Development Grant program is moved to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and jointly administered by the Education Department.
- Creation of a new, evidence-based research and innovation program similar to Investing in Innovation, or i3.

Weighted Student Funding

- A pilot project will let 50 districts try out a weighted student-funding formula, combining state, local, and federal funds to better serve low-income students and those with special needs.

Funding and Other Issues

- “Maintenance of effort” will remain in place, requiring states to keep up their own spending at a particular level in order to tap federal funds.

SOURCES: Every Student Succeeds Act; *Education Week*

Reprinted from Vol. 35, Issue 15, Jan. 6, 2016



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