



Technical Assistance Brief: Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and Accountability

Prepared for Pennsylvania Department of Education and ESSA Accountability Work Group

Prepared by: Beverly Mattson, Becky Smerdon, Augustus Mays

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The Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center at WestEd (MACC@WestEd) helps state leaders with their initiatives to implement, support, scale up, and sustain statewide education reforms. We work closely with state leaders in the Mid-Atlantic region of Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia. To learn more about MACC@WestEd visit macc-atwested.org or to learn about the technical assistance network funded by the U.S. Department of Education, visit www.ed.gov.

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I. Purpose

With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) designed a stakeholder engagement process that relies on participation from a group of diverse thought leaders and practitioners to inform framework recommendations to support state plan development. PDE formed four ESSA work groups that address the following focus areas: Assessment, Accountability, Educator Certification, and Educator Evaluation. PDE asked the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center at WestEd (MACC@WestEd) to provide support to the Accountability Work Group.

In June, 2016, PDE requested that MACC@WestEd provide a brief on accountability measures, state examples, and intervention strategies. To address this request, MACC@WestEd staff reviewed a variety of documents, including the ESSA act; analysis by WestEd and other organizations; PDE's website and relevant documents; and relevant resources from federally-funded centers (e.g., Center on Standards and Assessment Implementation (CSAI)) and national organizations (e.g., Council of Chief State School Officers).

This brief is divided into the following sections:

- **Summary of Key Accountability Requirements under ESSA** section provides a brief overview of focused requirements addressing indicators, identifying schools for assistance, and evidence-based interventions.
- **Overview of Pennsylvania's Current Accountability System** section briefly describes Pennsylvania's current, federally-required accountability system for Title I Schools under the ESEA waiver.
- **Current Accountability Measures Used by States** section presents an overview of accountability measures used by other Mid-Atlantic states.
- **Accountability Framework: California Case Study** provides information about California's accountability framework, an example of the accountability system from a collaborative of districts in California, and some accountability challenges that California has identified given ESSA draft regulations.
- **Evidence-Based Interventions** section defines and summarizes ESSA's use of the term "evidence-based interventions," and then presents examples of Pennsylvania's and many federally-funded resources available on evidence-based interventions.
- **Key considerations for States** section identifies implications and considerations for indicators, identifying schools for assistance, and evidence-based intervention.

Appendix A provides examples of the many federally-funded resources available on evidence-based interventions.

II. Summary of Key Accountability Requirements under ESSA

On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The law has opened up new possibilities for how student and school success are defined and supported in American public education. One notable shift from ESSA's immediate predecessor, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), is that states have greater responsibility for designing and building their state accountability systems, and for determining supports and interventions for schools and districts.

On May 26, 2016, the U.S. Department of Education (USED) released proposed regulations on accountability and State plans under ESSA. Public comments on the proposed regulations were due on August 1, 2016. (The proposed regulations may be accessed on the [Federal Register website](#).)¹

The proposed regulations provide clarifications on the ESSA requirements for the implementation of state accountability systems. The regulations signal challenges that states will need to consider, including, for example, measurement criteria for the school quality or student success indicator. It is expected that USED will issue final accountability regulations in late fall.

In this brief, we examine the options available to Pennsylvania to redefine its accountability system as the state begins implementing ESSA. We examine these possibilities, beginning with an overview of the law's requirements, including its allowances for indicators of school progress, methods of identifying schools for support and intervention, and the requirements for the use of evidenced-based interventions. This summary is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all ESSA requirements pertaining to accountability, but instead highlights the major new requirements under the law that are most pertinent to Pennsylvania's interests.

What does ESSA Require and Allow?

To answer this question, we consulted both the ESSA statute and draft regulations¹ to provide information on the:

- Types of indicators that states will use to meaningfully differentiate schools,
- Mechanisms for identifying schools for assistance, and
- Criteria for evidence-based interventions. It is important to note that these draft regulations are subject to change and will not be finalized until later this year.

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Indicators

In place of NCLB’s “adequately yearly progress” provisions, ESSA requires that each state implement a state-designed accountability system, based on its adopted academic standards, that includes long-term goals and interim measurements of progress toward those goals for all students, as well as for certain subgroups of students—i.e., economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial ethnic groups, children with disabilities, and English language learners.

The law specifies that, at a minimum, the state’s accountability system must have the following indicators for all public schools in a State:

- **Academic Achievement.** Achievement as measured by proficiency on annual assessments in English language arts, math, and science in each of grades 3–8, plus one grade in high school.
- **“Another Statewide Academic Indicator” (or “Academic Progress Indicator”).** For public elementary and secondary schools that are not high schools:²
 - A measure of student growth, based on the reading/language arts and mathematics assessments, if determined appropriate by the state; or
 - Another “valid and reliable statewide academic indicator” for elementary and middle schools.
- **High School Graduation Rate.** The four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate for high schools (states may add an extended-year adjusted cohort graduation rate if they choose).
- **English Language Proficiency.** A measure of progress in English language proficiency for English language learners (in each of grades 3–8, plus one grade in high school).
- **School Quality or Student Success Indicator.** At least one measure of school quality or student success that is valid, reliable, and comparable across the state and allows for meaningful differentiation in school performance. These measures may include student engagement, student access to advanced coursework, postsecondary readiness, school climate and safety, or other measures.

USDE’s proposed regulations (Section 200.14, Accountability Indicators) would require that each State, at a minimum, include four distinct indicators for each school that measures performance for all students and separately for each subgroup of students. The state must annually measure and report these data for all students and, separately, for each identified group of students. However, the law does not limit the number or kinds of indicators.

Under proposed regulations (Section 200.18(b)(1-4), Annual Meaningful Differentiation of School Performance), states would also be required to define at least three district levels of school performance for each indicator that are clear and understandable to the public. In addition, the draft regulations would require that each school receives a rating based on a school’s level of performance on each indicator that results in a single, summative rating for each school on annual LEA report cards.

² Note: This measure is optional for high schools.

Identifying Schools for Assistance

Starting in the 2017-2018 school year,³ and at least once every three years thereafter, ESSA requires that each state must use all of the annual accountability indicators listed above, disaggregated by student subgroup, to establish a system to differentiate public schools for purposes of comprehensive support and improvement and targeted support and improvement schools.⁴ States may add additional statewide categories of schools beyond “comprehensive” and “targeted” support and improvement.

Comprehensive Support and Improvement. ESSA requires states to identify the “lowest performing” five percent of all public schools that receive Title I funding, all public high schools that fail to graduate one-third or more of their students, schools previously identified by the state for support and improvement that have not satisfied the state-determined criteria for exit within the period specified by the state (which shall not exceed four years), and any additional statewide categories that a state deems appropriate. In identifying schools, states must give “substantial weight” to the first four indicators listed on page 4. In the aggregate, these indicators must be of “much greater weight” than the other school quality indicator(s) which may be non-academic in nature. Once identified, LEAs must complete a comprehensive support and improvement plan that:

- is informed by the indicators and long-term goals from the state’s accountability system;
- includes evidence-based interventions;
- responds to a school-level needs assessment; and
- identifies resource inequities that will be addressed.

The comprehensive support and improvement plan must then be approved by the school, LEA, and state education agency, and periodically monitored and reviewed by the state education agency.

Targeted Support and Improvement. In addition to those schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement, the state must identify, on an annual basis, schools where there are consistently underperforming subgroups of students. The LEA is then responsible for supporting the school in creating a school-level targeted support and improvement plan. Similar in structure to the comprehensive plan, the targeted support plans require evidence-based interventions and must be approved and monitored by the LEA.

³ Note: USDE’s proposed rulemaking would require that states identify schools for comprehensive and targeted support and improvement at the beginning of the 2017-18 school year.

⁴ Schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement, based on the performance of chronically low-performing student subgroups, would not need to be identified until 2018-2019.

III. Overview of Pennsylvania’s Current Accountability System

This section briefly describes the state’s current accountability system, which will continue through the 2016-17 school year during transition to ESSA. The Pennsylvania Accountability System applies to all public schools and districts and is based upon the State's content and achievement standards, measures of academic achievement, and other key indicators of school and district performance such as attendance and graduation rates. The current Pennsylvania Accountability System meets federal and state requirements.⁵

Pennsylvania’s Federal Accountability System (Title I Schools)

Beginning in 2013, under the ESEA Flexibility Waiver,⁶ Pennsylvania implemented a differentiated accountability/differentiated recognition system for Title I schools, which receive funds based on the percentages or total number of children from low-income families in a school’s attendance area (Pennsylvania Department of Education, Glossary of Terms).

The ESEA flexibility accountability system focused on four Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs). The AMOs included:

- **Test Participation Rate** of 95 percent on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSAs) and Keystone Exams in all student groups.

- **Graduation Rate/Attendance Rate.**
 - a. The school must achieve an 85 percent graduation rate (applied to four-, five-, and six-year cohorts) or meet the target of a reduction in the difference between its previous year’s graduation rate and
 - the goal of 85 percent by 10 percent when using the four-year cohort; or
 - the goal of 85 percent by 15 percent when using the five-year cohort; or
 - the goal of 85 percent by 20 percent when using the six-year cohort.

A Title I school with a graduation rate below 60 percent and not otherwise designated as a Priority school will be designated as a Focus school.

- b. **Average Daily Attendance Rate.** If no graduation rate is applicable, an attendance rate of 90 percent or an improvement from the previous year is required.

⁵ See PDE’s [Assessment and Accountability web page](#).

⁶ Under ESSA, states’ ESEA flexibility waivers expired on August 1, 2016. To transition from waivers to ESSA, states could choose to “freeze” their list of lowest-performing Priority and Focus Schools for continued support and interventions (as identified in existing improvement plans) through the 2016-17 school year or identify a new list of schools; Pennsylvania has opted to choose the former.

- **Closing the Achievement Gap for All Students.** The achievement gap is determined by comparing the percent of students who are proficient or advanced in the baseline year with 100 percent proficiency, and presumes closing 50 percent of that gap over a six-year period. The All Students group is defined as all students enrolled for a full academic year taking the PSSA, Keystone Exams, or the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA).⁷
- **Closing the Achievement Gap of Historically Underperforming Students – Same approach as for All Students.** Using the same approach for closing the achievement gap for all students, this AMO applies to a non-duplicated count of students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and English language learners who have been enrolled for a full academic year and take the PSSA, PASA, or Keystone Exams. If a student is in more than one of the individual groups (such as special education and English Language Learner), the student is counted only once.
 - a. The benchmark for closing the achievement gap is that 50% of the gap will be closed over a six-year period.

Designation of Title I Schools. Federal accountability reports differentiated recognition status for Title I schools based on AMOs and other federal requirements associated with each designation.⁸ Based on the federal requirements associated with each designation, PDE designated Title I schools as:

- Reward: High Achievement (highest performing five percent of Title I schools meeting all AMOs) or High Progress (highest performing five percent of Title I schools based on aggregated progress),
- Focus School (lowest performing 10 percent of Title I schools), or
- Priority School (lowest performing five percent of Title I schools).

Pennsylvania opted to freeze its list of Priority and Focus Schools through the 2016-17 school year during transition to ESSA.

Non-Title I Schools. Pennsylvania did not assign Non-Title I schools a federal accountability designation.

Finally, beyond designations associated with federal accountability, Pennsylvania uses its School Performance Profile (SPP) to report on the performance of **all** schools, using multiple indicators of academic growth and achievement, including the same AMOs incorporated for federal accountability purposes. The Department has been working with a diverse range of education stakeholders on possible revisions to SPP.

⁷ See PDE's [Assessment and Accountability web page](#).

⁸ Ibid.

IV. Current Accountability Measures Used by States

A recent report analyzed measures that states currently include in their accountability systems. The authors organized these state measures into major categories (Martin, Sargrad, & Batel, 2016). The numbers of indicators identified by states varied from a minimum of four indicators to a maximum of 26 indicators, with an average of 11 indicators (Martin, et.al., 2016).

Table 1 presents an overview of the categories of indicators from the author's summary, their descriptions, and the numbers of states using these measures.

Table 1. Summary of Indicators Currently Used in the United States

Indicator Category	Brief Description of Measures	Numbers of States Using Measure
Student Academic Achievement Indicators	Student academic achievement in English Language Arts (ELA) or reading and mathematics on state assessments	50 states
Student Academic Achievement Indicators	Student achievement in science, writing, or social studies on state assessments	15 states – science 2 states – writing 9 states – science & social studies 3 states – science, writing, and social studies
Student Academic Achievement Indicators	Test participation of less than 95 percent limits/reduces overall rating or classification	19 states
Student Academic Growth Indicators	Student Growth in ELA and mathematics between two points in time	46 states (definitions vary by state)
Student Academic Growth Indicators	Student Growth in science and/or social studies between two points in time	7 states (definitions vary by state)
English Language Acquisition Indicators	Measures of English language proficiency or growth	6 states
Student Attendance (Early Warning Indicator)	Average daily attendance Chronic absenteeism	18 states 5 states – chronic absenteeism 1 state – both attendance & chronic absenteeism

Indicator Category	Brief Description of Measures	Numbers of States Using Measure
High School Graduation Rates (Persistence Indicator)	Four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate Additional extended-year adjusted cohort graduation rates (five or more years)	49 states 37 states – at least one extended-year adjusted cohort rates, including five-, six-, or seven-year rates
Dropout Rates (Persistence Indicator)	Percentages of students who drop out of school in a given year	11 states
College & Career Ready	Participation &/or performance in Advanced coursework or exams or college entry exams	16 states
College & Career Ready	Career preparedness participation & performance	25 states
College & Career Ready	Postsecondary enrollment	6 states
School Climate and Culture	Measures of school climate & culture	4 states
Other ⁹	Reflect states value or incentives	27 states

Source: Martin, Sargrad, & Batel (2016)

⁹ Examples of “Other” indicators include the following: Improving K-3 literacy (Ohio), percentages of students meeting/exceeding physical fitness standards (Connecticut); and participation in visual and performing art classes (Connecticut and New Jersey).

Current Indicators Used by Other States in the Mid-Atlantic Region

Table 2 provides a closer look at current accountability indicators used by the other states in the Mid-Atlantic region, which includes the District of Columbia, Delaware, Maryland, and New Jersey. (Note that none of these states include English language proficiency indicators in these accountability systems.)

Table 2. Summary of Current Pennsylvania and State Indicators in the Mid-Atlantic Region

Achievement Indicators by states

State	ELA or Reading	Mathematics	Writing	Science	Social Studies
District of Columbia (DC)	X	X		X	
Delaware	X	X		X	X
Maryland	X	X		X	
New Jersey	X	X		X	

Student Growth Indicators by States

State	ELA or Reading	Mathematics	Writing	Science	Social Studies
DC	X	X		X	
Delaware	X	X			
Maryland	X	X			
New Jersey	X	X			

English Language Acquisitions

State
DC
Delaware
Maryland
New Jersey

Early Warning Indicators by States

State	Attendance Rate	Chronic Absenteeism	On track to graduate
DC			
Delaware	X		X
Maryland			
New Jersey		X	

Graduation and Dropout Indicators (Persistence Indicators) by States

State	4 Year Graduation Rate	Additional Years Graduation Rate (5+ years)	Dropout Rate	Re-engagement of Dropouts	Other (e.g. % earning GED)
DC	X				
Delaware	X	X			
Maryland	X	X	X		
New Jersey	X	X	X		

College & Career Ready Indicators by States

State	Participation in advanced course work, including AP or IB classes or dual enrollment	Performance in advanced course work, including AP or IB exams and dual enrollment course grades
DC		
Delaware		X
Maryland		X
New Jersey	X	X

Participation in or Performance on College Entry/Exit by States

State	Participation in college entry exams such as SAT or ACT	Performance on college entry exams such as SAT, ACT, ACCUPLA CER, or COMPASS	Participation in PSAT or ACT Aspire	Performance on PSAT or ACT Aspire	Participation and performance in SAT subject tests
DC					
Delaware		X			
Maryland					
New Jersey	X	X	X		

Career Preparedness Participation or Performance by States

State	Career preparedness participation, including completing career and technical education classes or WorkKeys assessments and participating in job training	Career preparedness performance, including earning credentials or certificates, performance on WorkKeys, and grades in career and technical education courses
DC		
Delaware		X
Maryland		X
New Jersey	X	

Postsecondary Enrollment by States

State	Postsecondary enrollment	Military enrollment within six months of graduation	College remedial course enrollment	Percentage of graduates not requiring college remediation
DC				
Delaware				
Maryland	X			
New Jersey	X			

Other Advanced Coursework Indicators by States

State	Percentage of students earning an advanced diploma	AP, International Baccalaureate, or college credit offered	Participation of middle school students in honors, pre-AP, or high-school level courses	Percentage of middle schoolers who passed a high-school-level end-of-course assessment or earned industry certification
DC				
Delaware				
Maryland				
New Jersey			X	

Arts and Physical Fitness by States

State	Percentage of students meeting or exceeding physical fitness standards	Participation in nutrition and physical activity program	Participation in visual and performing art classes
DC			
Delaware			
Maryland			
New Jersey			X

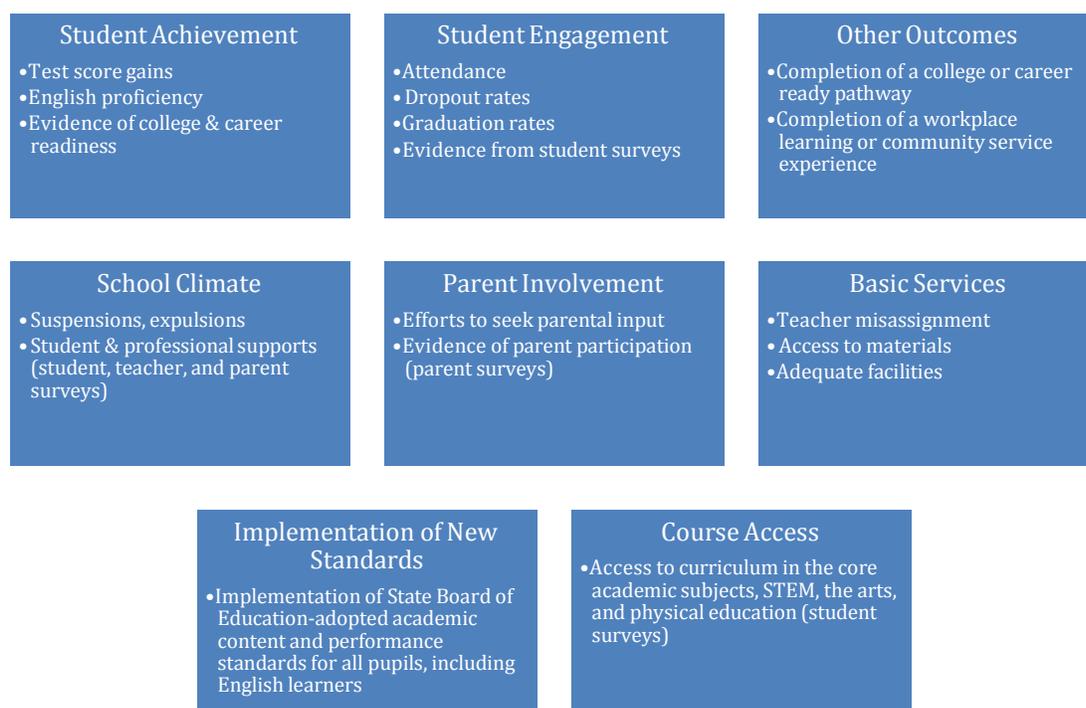
Source: Adapted from Martin, Sargrad, & Batel (2016)

V. Example of a State Accountability Framework: California CORE Districts

In 2013, California created a framework for a multiple measures accountability system focused on eight state priority areas and began a significant overhaul of how it provided resources to districts. The framework has three key components:

- **Resource accountability**, pursued through a weighted student funding formula with local school districts accountable for effective and equitable use of funds.
- **Local control and accountability plans**, which are required for school districts and charter schools and lay out local goals and strategies in the state's eight priority areas and link directly to local resource use decisions (see Figure 2).
- **California Collaborative for Educational Excellence**, which is an entity that would be created to provide technical assistance to schools and districts facing challenges they are able to solve locally.

Figure 2. Indicators required in local control and accountability plans



Source: Darling-Hammond & Plank, 2015, p. 11

For a detailed description of California's new accountability system, see Darling-Hammond & Plank, 2015.

Some of California's largest school districts are part of the California Office to Reform Education (CORE), a collaborative designed to build curriculum and assessment systems that support deeper learning and social emotional skill development. CORE Districts have developed a holistic approach to school improvement and accountability that focuses on academic preparedness, social-emotional skills, the culture and climate of a school, collaborative learning from each other, and supporting effective instruction (CORE districts, 2015). In August 2013, CORE Districts received an ESEA flexibility waiver for the School Quality Improvement System (CORE districts, 2015).

As part of the School Quality Improvement System, the CORE districts developed an index, which is described in the next sub-section.

School Quality Improvement Index

The School Quality Improvement Index represents a set of fundamental shifts in school accountability, grounded in the shared values and continuous improvement philosophy shared by the CORE Districts.

- “From accountability as a ‘hammer’ to accountability as ‘flashlight.’ The Index is designed to help school communities identify strengths that can be leveraged, and challenges to be addressed. Interventions and supports are focused on capacity building through peer learning and collaborative action.
- From a narrow focus to a holistic approach: The Index includes a basket of measures with indicators in both the academic domain, and the social-emotional and culture climate domain.
- Making all students visible by moving from an “n” of 100 to an “n” of 20: At the heart of the Index is a focus on eliminating disparity and disproportionality. For that reason, the Index includes results for any student group with 20 or more students.
- From just achievement to achievement and growth: The Index includes measures of individual student growth over time on state assessments in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics” (Core Districts, 2015).

Table 3 presents an overview of Core’s School Improvement Index, including domains, measures, and descriptions.

Table 3. Summary of CORE School Quality Improvement Index Measures

Domains	Measures	Descriptions
Academic (60%)	Academic Performance	Measures the percentage of students who meet grade level standards in English Language Arts and Math as measured by state standardized tests. The numerator is determined by identifying the number of students meeting grade level standards in ELA or math, as measured by being at level “3” or “4” on the assessment in question. The denominator is generally determined by the number of students tested. Any school testing less than 95% of eligible students in the all students group or any individual subgroup will receive an adjusted performance score in ELA and/or math that includes the number of non-tested students as “not meeting standards” for both the “all students” group and each subgroup, raising each to the total number of students to the equivalent of 95%.
Academic (60%)	Growth	Measures of academic growth examine individual student performance over time. The CORE Growth model is designed to look at the extent to which schools have helped students move from point A to point B relative to students who started the school year in a similar place (e.g., in terms of prior achievement and in terms of observable demographics like English Learner status or socioeconomic status). Results are expressed on a scale from 1 to 99 with 50 being average growth. Results include both a point estimate (e.g., best estimate) and a 95% confidence interval to account for errors in the estimates (e.g., due to lower n sizes, known measurement error in the tests, “noisy” results).
Academic (60%)	High School Readiness	The percentage of 8th graders who meet a set of criteria that predict they are highly likely to graduate high school on time: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8th grade GPA of 2.5 or better, AND • Attendance 96% or better in 8th grade, AND • No D’s or F’s in ELA or Math in 8th grade final course (typically spring semester) grades, AND • Never suspended in 8th grade.
Academic (60%)	Graduation	Every student entering high school is automatically placed into a 4-year cohort. Students who transfer out are subtracted from the cohort. New enrollees are added to the cohort as they transfer in. The number of graduates four years later is used to calculate the 4-year cohort graduation rate (graduates divided by students in the cohort). Similarly, the number of cumulative graduates five and six years later is used to calculate the 5-year and 6-year cohort graduation rates, respectively.

Domains	Measures	Descriptions
Social Emotional & Culture Climate Factors (40%)	Chronic Absenteeism	Student who has an attendance rate of less than or equal to 90%, including excused and unexcused absences. The number of chronically absent students is aggregated to the school level to determine the number and proportion of chronically absent students for each school.
Social Emotional & Culture Climate Factors (40%)	Student, Staff, Parent Culture-Climate Surveys	Students in grades 5-12, teachers and staff, and parents, guardians and caregivers participate in surveys to assess their perceptions of school culture-climate. Indicators include: Teaching and Learning, Interpersonal Relationships, Safety, and School-Community Engagement.
Social Emotional & Culture Climate Factors (40%)	Suspension and Expulsion Rates	The percent of individual students suspended and/or expelled.
Social Emotional & Culture Climate Factors (40%)	Social Emotional Skills	Students in grades 5-12 self-report on four competencies: growth mindset, self-efficacy, self-management, and social awareness.
Social Emotional & Culture Climate Factors (40%)	English Language Learner Re-designation	The California English Language Development Test (CELDT) is the state's designated test of English language proficiency. Based on the mastery of the CELDT content, this measure includes the number of students who are re-designated in a given year.
Information Only	Disproportionality in Special Education	Comparison of each student subgroup's representation in the special education population of a particular school to that subgroup's representation in the overall school population, identifying cases where a particular subgroup is over-represented in special education that is statistically meaningful (99% confidence level).

Source: Core Districts (2015)

Challenges Presented by ESSA to California

Currently, the California State Board of Education (SBE) is developing evaluation rubrics which will provide information to all LEAs and schools about performance on a concise set of indicators across the eight priority areas outlined. The framework, multiple measures and concise indicators, which has emerged after significant engagement with stakeholders, provides the foundation for a single accountability and continuous improvement system across the state.

In their comments to USDE regarding the Department's draft proposed regulations on accountability and state plans under ESSA, the California state superintendent and the president of the state school board wrote:

“Reporting performance on multiple indicators reflects a holistic understanding of what contributes to a quality education for all students and student groups. It allows educators and policymakers to identify more precisely where focused or more intensive support is needed. And it promotes equity and continuous improvement by focusing on disparities among student groups across all indicators, which supports local decision-makers and stakeholders in prioritizing improvement efforts.”¹⁰

Their comments then turn to concerns, including the belief that the proposed regulations will “derail the significant progress being made in our state towards creating a single, aligned system.”

Among their concerns are the following:

- A single summative rating undermines equity by masking disparities within indicators and undercuts the value of a multiple measures system.
- The proposed regulations' approach to assigning weights is unduly restrictive (particularly assigning much greater weight to academic indicators).
- The proposed regulations create additional challenges for alternative schools (many of which are designed to meet the needs of at-risk populations).
- Proficiency on assessments is too narrowly defined (and may incentivize LEAs and schools to focus on students who fall near proficiency cut scores instead of encouraging improvement among all students).

¹⁰ For a copy of California's letter to USED, please see Valerie Strauss, [“Obama administration accused of trying to dictate education policy to states – again,”](#) *Washington Post*, August 9, 2016.

VI. Evidence-Based Interventions

ESSA emphasizes evidence-based interventions and activities in districts and schools to drive better outcomes for students. Throughout ESSA, the term "evidence-based" is used to define the nature of actions permitted or required of recipient states and districts. ESSA's definition of evidence-based interventions includes two categories based on levels of evidence:

1. Demonstrates a **statistically significant effect** on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes; or
2. Demonstrates a **rationale based on high-quality research or positive evaluation** that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes or other relevant outcomes and includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of such activity, strategy, or intervention.

Under category one, the definition refers to an activity, strategy, or intervention that demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on:

1. **Strong evidence** - based on at least one well-designed and well-implemented **experimental** study (e.g., study using randomized-control trials)
2. **Moderate evidence** - based on at least one well-designed and well implemented **quasi- experimental** study (e.g., matched study comparison group studies, or pre-post studies)
3. **Promising evidence** - based on at least one well-designed and well-implemented **correlational** study with statistical controls for selection bias

ESSA applies the definition of evidence-based at least 54 times, ranging from required uses to allowable uses to incentive sizes. This section focuses on the evidence-based requirements addressing accountability and responsibilities for states, LEAs, and schools. When districts and schools prepare to implement evidence-based interventions, they will need to:

- Become familiar with the definition and levels of evidence for interventions;
- Choose evidence-based interventions that match their needs, resources, and contexts;
- Increase the knowledge and skills of staff in preparation for implementation of an intervention including school readiness for the intervention;
- Effectively support implementation of the interventions during its stages/phases so it is fully implemented with fidelity; and
- Monitor and evaluate the implementation and its outcomes throughout its stages/phases.

Examples of Pennsylvania Resources

Pennsylvania has already identified resources that may be used, as appropriate, to support school improvement. Resources, aligned to accountability categories or domains, are detailed below.

Table 4. Examples of Evidence-based Interventions Correlated with Accountability Indicators

Accountability Indicator Domain	Examples of Measures	Examples of Evidence-based Interventions	Examples of Resources
Student Achievement	Indicators of Academic Achievement in English language arts (PSSA, PASA, Keystone Exams)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of effective reading instruction addressing the five components of reading (e.g., comprehension) • Implementation of effective adolescent literacy strategies • Early identification and support of at-risk students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Reading Panel report • What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) Practice Guides • Doing What Works Practice Guides • Pennsylvania’s Comprehensive Literacy Plan • PA Multi-tiered Systems of Support (PA- MTSS)/Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtII)
Student Achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators of Academic Achievement in English language arts (PSSA, PASA, Keystone Exams) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of effective mathematics instructional practices (e.g., explicit instruction) • Implementation of comprehensive framework of school improvement and/or a multi-tiered system of supports aligned with academic standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Mathematics Advisory Panel and National Research Council reports on research-based practices • WWC Practice Guides • Doing What Works Practice Guides • PA MTSS/RtII

Accountability Indicator Domain	Examples of Measures	Examples of Evidence-based Interventions	Examples of Resources
Student Growth or Closing the Achievement Gap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Progress Indicator • Closing the Achievement Gap Indicator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of comprehensive framework of school improvement and/or a multi-tiered system of supports aligned with academic standards • Implementation of Universal Design for Learning • Extended learning time strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WWC Practice Guides on Assisting Struggling Students • Center for Innovative Learning • National Center on Intensive Instruction • PA-MTSS/RtII
English Language Proficiency or Acquisition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measures of progress in English language proficiency • English learners reclassification rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of effective practices for literacy and English language instruction (e.g., vocabulary development, explicit instruction in phonics, comprehension strategies) • Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WWC Practice Guide on Effective Literacy and Language Instruction • USED English Learner Toolkit • National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth. • National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA) • Center for Research on the Educational Achievement and Teaching of English Language Learners

Accountability Indicator Domain	Examples of Measures	Examples of Evidence-based Interventions	Examples of Resources
Student Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance rates • Chronic absenteeism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of a multi-tiered approach to student attendance, including universal schoolwide strategies, targeted strategies for chronically absent students, and individualized strategies for students missing 20 percent or more. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance Works • Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University • USED's Chronic absenteeism in the nation's schools report/A Community toolkit to address and eliminate chronic absenteeism
High School Graduation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduation Rate (adjusted cohort graduation rate for four years) • Students on track to graduate (9th graders) • Successful reentry of students (drop-outs, justice system-involved youth) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early identification and support of at-risk students • Early college high schools • Career academies • Check & Connect (comprehensive student engagement intervention) • Credit recovery programs • Interventions or Reengagement Programs • Alternative Education programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College & Career Readiness & Success Center • PA Completion for all Pennsylvania Students (CAPS) • National High School Center • Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University • PA Educator Dashboard Early Warning System and Intervention Catalog • National Dropout Prevention Center • WWC Dropout Prevention Practice Guide

Accountability Indicator Domain	Examples of Measures	Examples of Evidence-based Interventions	Examples of Resources
College & Career Readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student participation in college prep or advanced coursework • Student success in dual or concurrent enrollment courses • Students earning industry-recognized certificates or credentials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rigorous college-ready courses, curriculum, and instruction aligned with post-secondary expectations • Multiple pathways to college and career • Personalized graduation plans • Early identification and support of at-risk students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WWC Practice Guide • College & Career Readiness & Success Center • Educational Policy & Improvement Center (EPIC)
Social Emotional and School Climate and Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators of School Quality • Student suspension and expulsion rates • Potential indicators from National School Climate Center • Measures of student and parent engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) – Tier 1-3 Supports • Implementation of effective social emotional learning skills & programs • Bullying, harassment, and violence prevention • Office of Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework (OHS PFCE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USED Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline • PA Positive Behavior Support (PBS) • PA School Climate Survey • USED Directory of Federal School Climate and Discipline Resources • WWC Practice Guides on Reducing Behavior Problems • National School Climate Center • Social Programs that Work • Collaborative for Academic, Social & Emotional Learning (CASEL) • Harvard Family Research Project

VII. Key Considerations for States

ESSA provides opportunities for states to move beyond accountability requirements of No Child Left Behind and ESEA Flexibility Waivers, review their current accountability system in light of the ESSA requirements, and make recommendations for an accountability system that promotes continuous improvement. Below are examples of issues states may wish to consider as they develop their ESSA plans.

General Considerations

- What is the state’s vision for its accountability system and how it connects to meaningful supports and continuous improvement for all public schools and districts?
 - What will districts and schools need to address the accountability requirements under ESSA and drive continuous improvement?
 - How will the accountability system provide useful feedback to schools and districts that will drive and promote continuous improvement? (Elgart, 2016)
- How will the state ensure that its accountability system is clear and transparent for all stakeholders, particularly parents and families?

Accountability Indicators

Given ESSA’s requirements for accountability indicators, states may want to consider the following:

- What indicators will communicate the effectiveness of the state’s accountability system and determine the overall effectiveness of its continuous improvement processes?
- What is recommended for the academic progress indicator for elementary and middle schools, such as growth in ELA and mathematics, that can inform valid and reliable assessments of school performance?
- What is recommended for the indicator for English language proficiency for English language learners (in each of grades 3–8, plus one grade in high school)?¹¹
 - What are the implications and opportunities associated with incorporating English language proficiency into the accountability system?
- How will the requirement that 95 percent of all students and each student subgroup participate in assessments be factored into the accountability system? (CSAI, 2016)
- What are the recommendations for the additional indicator(s) of school quality or student success (e.g., school climate/safety, student engagement, educator engagement, or postsecondary readiness) that allow for meaningful differentiation of public schools?
- What weights should be assigned to specific accountability indicators?

¹¹ Note: The assessment will need to align with the Pennsylvania’s English Language Proficiency Standards. Please refer to the MACC@WestEd brief on English language proficiency for additional information and suggested considerations.

Identification of Schools for Assistance

Given the ESSA requirements for identifying schools, states may want to consider the following:

- Are there any recommendations for identifying schools beyond targeted support and improvement and comprehensive support and improvement schools?
 - For example, would the state want to consider recognizing high-performing schools and/or high-growth schools?
- What are the recommendations for a school needs assessment that would align with the indicators and identify a school's strengths and weaknesses, serving as the basis for an improvement plan?
- Are there any recommendations for the development and implementation of evidence-based improvement plans?
- Since states have the flexibility to determine exit criteria from identification, what is recommended for the criteria for targeted support and improvement and comprehensive support and improvement schools?

Evidence-Based Interventions

Under ESSA, states may establish evidence-based interventions or approve a list for LEAs to use at their discretion (CCSSO, 2016b). States must demonstrate that the selected interventions are evidence-based.

Given the above, states may want to consider the following:

- Should states establish a list of approved evidenced-based interventions for districts and schools? Should states provide choices of specific evidence-based interventions for school improvement planning and implementation?
- What are the implications for increasing the knowledge and capacity of district and school personnel to select and implement evidence-based interventions?
 - What approaches and resources will be needed to support implementation of evidence-based interventions by schools and districts?
- How can the state assure that technical assistance providers to schools have the knowledge and experience in implementation of evidenced-based practices?
- What are recommendations for monitoring the implementation of evidence-based practices by identified schools? (CCSSO, 2016b)

Appendix A

Examples of Federally-funded Resources for Interventions

There are a variety of resources available from centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education and other agencies. A few are listed here.

[The What Works Clearinghouse](#)

Established by the U.S. Department of Education's (USED) Institute of Education Sciences to provide educators, policymakers, and the public with a central, independent, and trusted source of scientific evidence of what works in education. The website includes a variety of resources, such as practice guides

[Doing What Works](#)

The Doing What Works (DWW), funded by USED, helps educators understand and use research-based practices through interviews with researchers and practitioners, multimedia examples and sample materials from real schools and classrooms, and tools that can help educators take action. DWW content is based on research reviews conducted or endorsed by the Institute of Education Sciences.

[Content Centers](#)

The seven Content Centers, funded by USED, are responsible for providing in-depth knowledge, expertise, and analyses in its focal area to Regional Comprehensive Centers (e.g., MACC@WestEd) and the States they serve. Content Centers disseminate information about scientifically based research on effective practice and research-based products in their area of specialty and provide expertise that Regional Centers can use in delivering technical assistance to States. The seven content centers are:

- Building State Capacity and Productivity
- College and Career Readiness and Success
- Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes
- Great Teachers and Leaders
- Innovations in Learning
- School Turnaround
- Standards and Assessments Implementation

The MACC@WestEd is available to identify additional evidence-based interventions and resources.

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