# Contents

Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 3  
How Pennsylvania Designed its System for Annual Meaningful Differentiation ...................... 5  
ESSA and the Future Ready PA Index: An Aligned Approach................................................... 7  
How Pennsylvania Designates Schools for Improvement......................................................... 8  
  CSI Designation ...................................................................................................................... 9  
  How Pennsylvania Designates A-TSI Schools .................................................................... 11  
Exit Criteria ............................................................................................................................. 12  
  What CSI/A-TSI Means For My School ............................................................................. 13  
Additional Resources ............................................................................................................. 13  
Conclusion ................................................................................................................................. 14  
  Appendix A: Pennsylvania’s Federal Accountability Indicators ............................................ 15  
  Appendix B: CSI Designation School Examples ................................................................. 16  
  Appendix C: Frequently Asked Questions ............................................................................. 17
Introduction

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 provides each state with enhanced flexibility to designate and serve schools in need of support. The Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Every Student Succeeds Act Accountability Handbook is designed to provide education leaders with an overview of our state’s accountability system as well as guidance on how to communicate about it to key stakeholders.

The process of designating schools for support—termed “Annual Meaningful Differentiation” by the federal statute—results in two federally prescribed designations, made at least every three years beginning December 2018:

1. **Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI):** Schools facing the most significant challenges in academic achievement, student growth, and other areas; and
2. **Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (A-TSI):** Schools in which performance by one or more student groups is at or below the level of the CSI schools.

ESSA requires states to designate schools for an additional category of Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) on an annual basis beginning Fall 2019. States have greater latitude in designating and supporting these schools, which may move in and out of improvement cycles with greater fluidity than the CSI and A-TSI schools designated every three years. Pennsylvania will share additional details concerning TSI designated schools by Spring 2019.

Whatever the designation, ESSA provides states greater flexibility to set conditions that can ensure equitable opportunities for all students, and to strike the appropriate balance between holding schools accountable for improving and providing extra tools and resources. In an important shift from No Child Left Behind Act policies, Pennsylvania’s approach to ESSA implementation emphasizes collaboration between state and local stakeholders to identify and address root causes for existing challenges, to implement appropriate and evidence-based corrective actions, and to carefully monitor the pace of improvement.

**Talking Points**

- ESSA requires every state education agency (SEA) to craft and implement a system of school accountability called “Annual Meaningful Differentiation.”
- As required by ESSA, the system designates schools that are eligible for additional supports.
- Under Pennsylvania’s ESSA Plan, these supports will be tailored to the community’s unique needs.
This document is organized into several sections:

- How Pennsylvania Designed its System for Annual Meaningful Differentiation
- ESSA and the Future Ready PA Index
- How Pennsylvania Designates Schools for Improvement
- Additional Resources and Appendices

Each section contains talking points that summarize the content and may be helpful for communicating about local impacts with internal and external stakeholders.

**Key Dates**

**December 2018:** Release of federal accountability determinations under Pennsylvania’s ESSA State Plan. Federal accountability determinations draw on a subset of Future Ready PA Index indicators.


**Fall 2019:** Designation of TSI
How Pennsylvania Designed its System for Annual Meaningful Differentiation

In a break with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, ESSA affords states significant flexibility in designing school accountability systems, within a few basic parameters:

- All public schools are subject to the accountability determinations;
- Information derived from academic indicators—for example, assessment results, graduation rates, and the progress of English learners—must receive “greater weight” in accountability determinations than non-academic indicators, such as regular attendance; and
- The system must designate buildings exhibiting low performance overall (what ESSA terms “Comprehensive Support and Improvement” or CSI schools), as well as buildings in which one or more individual groups of 20 or more students¹ exhibit low performance (“Additional Targeted Support and Improvement,” or A-TSI schools, and “Targeted Support and Improvement” or TSI schools).

The design of Pennsylvania’s system of Annual Meaningful Differentiation began with a series of nationally recognized stakeholder engagement activities that occurred over the course of 2016 and 2017. These efforts included a 20-member work group, comprised of educators and other stakeholders from a diverse cross-section of communities, who urged the Department to base its accountability system on “an array of indicators of student experiences and growth” that can support “system-wide continuous and sustainable improvement by providing transparent, timely, and meaningful feedback to all stakeholders.”²

Talking Points

- Pennsylvania designed its plan for Annual Meaningful Differentiation through a nationally-recognized stakeholder engagement effort that included educators, parents and families, and policy and community leaders.
- The system is based on three principles: equity, transparency, and innovation.
- Pennsylvania’s system of Annual Meaningful Differentiation is designed to lessen the impact of a single year of test scores. It prioritizes multiple years of data, evaluating student growth alongside proficiency, and appropriate non-academic evidence.

¹ The ESSA requires states to specify a standard for the number of students, or minimum “n-size,” that trigger the reporting of academic and other data at the school and student group levels. Pennsylvania’s ESSA Plan lowers the state’s n-size from 40 to 20, to ensure additional transparency around school and student group performance while protecting student privacy and attending to the need for measurement stability.

These efforts allowed the Department to identify three key principles for the design of the state’s system of Annual Meaningful Differentiation:

1. **Equity**: Pennsylvania’s approach to Annual Meaningful Differentiation will designate and focus resources on the schools and students in greatest need of support, with particular attention to historically underserved communities;

2. **Transparency**: Pennsylvania’s accountability systems and school progress reporting will provide educators, parents and families, and other stakeholders with clear and meaningful reporting on both school and student group performance, as well as the ability to identify and act on opportunity gaps; and

3. **Innovation**: Pennsylvania will leverage the flexibility offered by ESSA to broaden conceptions of school progress to include academic growth, non-academic measures, and opportunity to learn factors.

Building from these foundational principles, the Department established several important tenets for ensuring that school designation procedures are technically sound and evidence-based:

- **Use multiple years of data**: Federal accountability determinations come with additional financial resources and technical assistance, but they also come with added responsibilities and the possibility of more rigorous interventions if performance continues to lag. Given the implications associated with accountability determinations, the Department felt strongly that, whenever possible, multiple years of data should inform the designation process.

- **Leverage both academic and non-academic evidence**: ESSA requires states to weight academic indicators such as achievement more heavily in school designation procedures, but the Department’s approach to Annual Meaningful Differentiation ensures that no school will be designated because of test scores alone. In addition, Pennsylvania’s ESSA State Plan includes two non-academic measures (regular attendance and career readiness) that provide additional information on the contributions of all school professionals, including those working outside traditional tested subjects.

- **Consider both achievement and growth**: Research and stakeholder feedback reinforce the importance of evaluating academic growth to equitably and appropriately “determine a school’s ability to create high levels of achievement over time and to close achievement gaps.”[^3] Accordingly, Pennsylvania’s Annual Meaningful Differentiation rules will evaluate two years of academic achievement alongside two years of academic growth.

- **Base accountability decisions on school performance, not policy weights**: Accountability systems that rely on aggregation of dissimilar measures to reach a single summative grade or score can mask critical, indicator-level data, as well as

information on the performance of individual student subgroups.\textsuperscript{4} As noted by the Learning Policy Institute, “Pennsylvania’s approach…support[s] continuous improvement across all schools for each of the indicators, while also accurately identifying schools that are low-performing and not improving or that have large, persistent equity gaps.”

ESSA and the Future Ready PA Index: An Aligned Approach

Based on these principles and feedback from stakeholders, Pennsylvania identified six indicators for its system for Annual Meaningful Differentiation:

1. Academic achievement,
2. Academic growth,
3. English learner progress,
4. High school graduation rate,
5. Chronic absenteeism (publicly reported in the inverse, as regular attendance), and

Together, these indicators represent the most balanced measurement of school progress in Pennsylvania’s experience with federal accountability, while still ensuring that schools designated for support can focus appropriately on improvement efforts. (See Appendix A for a detailed summary of indicators.)

The Department believes it is important to share a complete picture of the progress of every public school in the commonwealth, not just those designated for improvement. To that end, in Fall 2018, the Department launched the Future Ready PA Index, a collection of school progress measures related to school and student success. Future Ready PA Index measures are grouped by three main categories—academic success, on-track, and college and career readiness—to provide families, educators, and other stakeholders with a comprehensive framework for understanding the contributions public schools make to ensure that every student is college, career, and community ready. A subset of Future Ready PA Index indicators are used for Pennsylvania’s federal system of Annual Meaningful Differentiation; this distinction is important, as not every measure that is useful for assessing school progress is appropriate for federal accountability determinations or satisfies specific federal requirements.

\textsuperscript{4} For example, research by The Education Trust revealed a nearly 20-point gap in reading proficiency between white and African American students among one state’s “A” schools in 2014; in another state, the highest rated “distinguished” schools reported a nearly 30-point achievement gap in math.
Ultimately, a broader set of measures will give parents, educators, LEA leaders, and other stakeholders a richer view of how Pennsylvania’s schools are performing. As Luke Lansberry, Superintendent of the DuBois Area School District, said, “The Future Ready PA dashboard will serve as a powerful tool to help guide our work. PDE representatives want to ensure that our schools and communities are accountable and empowered to provide effective, engaging instruction.”

Learn more about the Future Ready PA Index by visiting futurereadypa.org/.

**How Pennsylvania Designates Schools for Improvement**

As noted earlier, ESSA requires states to explain how the results from accountability indicators—both individually and in the aggregate—inform the designation of CSI, A-TSI, and TSI schools. CSI and A-TSI schools must be designated every three years beginning in 2018, and TSI schools must be designated annually beginning in 2019. Table 1 (below) provides a high-level summary of these federally required improvement cycles.

**Table 1. Summary of Federally Required Improvement Cycles.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improvement Cycle</th>
<th>Based On</th>
<th>Designation Cycle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI)        | • Schoolwide performance; ESSA requires that Comprehensive Support and Improvement include “not less than the lowest-performing five percent of all schools receiving (Title I) funds in the State;” and  
• Any high school – Title I or not – with a combined 4- and 5-year adjusted cohort graduation rate of 67 percent or less. | Every three years, beginning Fall 2018 |
| 2. Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (A-TSI)| • Performance by one or more student groups at or below the level of the bottom five percent (CSI) schools. | Every three years, beginning Fall 2018 |
| 3. Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI)             | • Performance by one or more student groups.                              | Every year, beginning Fall 2019    |
CSI Designation

Pennsylvania created a three-step system for designating CSI schools that will apply to all schools receiving funds under Title I, Part A. This process gradually narrows the number of eligible schools until the state designates five percent of Title I buildings statewide, consistent with ESSA requirements; for Pennsylvania, this is approximately 100 schools statewide.

The steps are as follows:

**Step 1. Preliminary designation based on academic achievement and academic growth**

Pennsylvania will initially categorize schools as eligible for designation based on performance in two domains:

1. The percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on state assessments in English language arts and mathematics combined over two years (2016-17 and 2017-18 for the Fall 2018 round of designation); **AND**
2. Academic growth as expressed by PVAAS-reported Average Growth Index, indicating if the school met the PA Standard for Academic Growth over two years (2016-17 and 2017-18).

The state will initially designate schools that have exhibited the lowest performance in both domains, as shown in Figure 2 below. **For Fall 2018 accountability determinations, schools reporting proficiency rates of 31.5 percent and below and growth scores of -1.01 and below are eligible for designation.**

---

**Talking Points**

- Pennsylvania will designate schools using multiple data points and multiple years of data.
- CSI schools will be designated in a three-step process that uses student proficiency and growth alongside non-academic indicators.
- A-TSI schools will be designated using the same basic process as CSI—except using student group performance in place of school performance—as required by law.
- TSI presents an opportunity to create an additional structure to promote equity in education. The designation process will be finalized in 2019.

---

5 The proficiency cut was established by identifying the median proficiency rate among all Title I schools; the Department then identified the median proficiency level among the schools falling below the original statewide median. The growth cut signifies that a school falling at or below this level missed progress targets at a confidence level of at least 68 percent.
Step 2. Final designation based on additional academic and non-academic indicators. Next, Pennsylvania will examine the performance of schools designated in Step 1 on remaining accountability indicators. Schools designated in Step 1 will be designated for CSI if they:

1. Fall below state-designated performance levels on high school graduation rate or English learner proficiency;\(^6\) OR
2. Fall below state-designated performance levels on both regular attendance and career readiness indicators.\(^7\)

See Appendix C for examples of the interplay among Step 2 indicators for purposes of CSI designation.

Step 3. Designation of additional high schools with low graduation rates

In addition to steps 1 and 2, ESSA requires that states designate “all public high schools in the state failing to graduate one third or more of their students.” Pennsylvania will designate any such schools, regardless of Title I status, through evaluation of the four- and five-year adjusted cohort graduation rates.

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the three-step designation process.

\(^6\) Performance levels were established by creating ranks for each indicator, from highest to lowest performance, and then identifying a common cut point across the indicators to designate the required number of buildings.

\(^7\) Schools for which only one of these indicators is available (for example, a K-4 school that will report chronic absenteeism but not K-5 career readiness data), and that fall in the bottom quartile of performance for that indicator will also be designated for CSI.
How Pennsylvania Designates A-TSI Schools

Consistent with ESSA requirements, Pennsylvania will use the same, basic three-step approach to designate schools in which one or more student groups face both academic and student success challenges. Like the system for CSI designation, these schools will be designated every three years, when one or more student groups in a school perform below the CSI thresholds for academic proficiency, academic growth, and at least one additional indicator.

Also consistent with CSI determinations, any school in which the combined four- and five-year adjusted cohort graduation rate for one or more student groups is 67 percent or below will be designated for A-TSI.

TSI Designation to Come in Fall 2019

While states are required to designate A-TSI schools using the same basic approach employed for their CSI designations, more flexibility is available for designating TSI schools. This presents an opportunity for Pennsylvania to support additional schools to promote equity. PDE will share additional details concerning TSI determinations in Spring 2019.
Exit Criteria

Schools designated for CSI as well as A-TSI will have four years to satisfy certain standards—what ESSA calls “exit criteria”—before additional interventions apply. Pennsylvania’s exit criteria include:

- Exceed accountability determination standards in the subsequent round of Annual Meaningful Differentiation. In other words, a school designated for CSI in 2018 may not exit this improvement cycle in 2022 if it is reidentified for CSI in 2021.
- Demonstrate measurable improvement on achievement and other indicators that were the basis of the initial accountability determination. These gains must be commensurate with the gap closing methodology established in the State Plan (i.e., on-track to close at least half of the gap between current performance and 2030 goals) and must represent both whole-school progress and gains by historically underserved or underperforming students.
- Partner in agency-provided technical assistance activities through the Statewide System of District and School Improvement.
What CSI/A-TSI Means For My School

Schools designated as CSI and A-TSI are eligible for a variety of supports as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Examples of Supports for CSI and A-TSI Schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Supports and Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional Improvement Teams who will partner with LEAs and schools to conduct local needs assessments, identify and support improvement strategies, and monitor plan implementation</td>
<td>Technical assistance through intermediate unit to implement targeted improvement plans for designated student groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Human Capital Coalitions to support LEAs in strengthening educator and school leader pipelines</td>
<td>Evidence Resource Center to provide information on research-based strategies that reflect local context and conditions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI)  ✓  ✓  ✓

Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (A-TSI)  ✓  ✓  ✓

Additional Resources

ESSA marks a major shift in federal education policy—new rules, new terminology, and new expectations for schools. The Department understands that these shifts require leaders at the classroom, school, and LEA levels to communicate these changes to parents, families, and other stakeholders. To support the field in this work, the Department has developed:

- Sample message points on major ESSA accountability determinations that can be tailored to meet local needs;
- A sample slide deck that can be adapted for use with local school boards and charter boards of trustees, parent advisory councils, and other audiences; and
Fact sheets on the state’s new approach to supporting schools designated for improvement.

You can find these and other resources on the Department’s Every Student Succeeds Act webpage.

**Conclusion**

In implementing ESSA’s Annual Meaningful Differentiation requirements, Pennsylvania continually returned to three key considerations—equity, innovation, and transparency. These principles helped the Department navigate the tradeoffs inherent in the design of any complex policy, and to resolve those questions as consistently as possible. The resulting system includes a broader range of academic and non-academic indicators, appropriate attention to student growth, multiple years of data, and a focus on continuous improvement in depictions of school and student group progress. Under Pennsylvania’s Consolidated State Plan, schools in need of support will understand the specific causes for an accountability determination and will have access to a range of supports designed in collaboration with Pennsylvania educators.

The determinations released this fall represent the first step in a fundamentally different approach to school improvement in Pennsylvania—one that emphasizes shared responsibility for the state, communities, and schools; that sets conditions for effective, engaging instruction in every classroom; and that prepares every student to be college, career, and community ready. The Department is confident that this system will help us to achieve our overall vision for public education: Pennsylvania learners will be prepared for meaningful engagement in postsecondary education; in workforce training; in career pathways; and to be responsible, involved citizens.
# Appendix A: Pennsylvania’s Federal Accountability Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Reported for grades</th>
<th>Multiple years of data utilized in calculation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Achievement: Percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on state assessments—Pennsylvania System School Assessment (PSSA), Keystones, Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA)—in English language arts and math.</td>
<td>PSSAs: Grades 3-8 Keystones: Grade 11 PASA: Grades 3-8 and 11</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Growth: Utilizing state assessment data and controlling for students’ prior assessment history, a school’s Average Growth Index reflects the evidence that a school’s students achieved the expected level of growth over the academic year.</td>
<td>PSSAs: Grades 4-8 Keystones: Grade 11</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate: Percentage of students graduating in four- and five-year cohorts.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Learner Proficiency: Percentage of English Learners meeting individual attainment targets as measured by the ACCESS for ELLs®.</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>Yes*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Attendance: Percentage of students, enrolled for 60 or more school days, present 90 percent or more of school days.</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Standards Benchmark: Percentage of students demonstrating meaningful engagement in career exploration and preparation aligned to the Career Education and Work standards. During the first year of implementation, school entities will be expected to demonstrate that students who are designated as meeting criteria have at least two pieces of evidence.</td>
<td>Grades 5, 8, and 11</td>
<td>2017-18 is first year of reporting; multiple years of data will be utilized in future designation cycles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentage of students meeting target is reported for the most recent year (e.g., school year 2017-18 for Fall 2018 accountability determinations); however, student performance is a growth measure, derived from progress in language acquisition over multiple years.
Appendix B: CSI Designation School Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Example</th>
<th>Substantially Weighted Indicators</th>
<th>School Quality and Success Indicators</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grades served; school characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-5; EL subgroup meets N-size</td>
<td>ELP Progress</td>
<td>Graduation Rate</td>
<td>Chronic Absenteeism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N.A.; not a high school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-6; EL subgroup does not meet N-size</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8; EL subgroup meets N-size</td>
<td></td>
<td>N.A.; not a high school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9; EL subgroup does not meet N-size</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12; EL subgroup meets N-size</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12; EL subgroup does not meet N-size</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Frequently Asked Questions

The frequently asked questions and answers that appear below were pulled from CCSSO’s 2018 publication “Engaging Around State Accountability Systems: How to Prepare for and Support the Release of State Accountability Decisions.” The answers are offered as suggestions for how LEAs can respond to commonly asked questions and can be used to enhance talking points. All responses should be customized.

Statewide Accountability Systems

How did the state decide to use this system? Were stakeholders involved in designing the system?
• The state engaged a wide variety of stakeholders, including parents, administrators, educators, and other community members, to develop its accountability system under ESSA.

What does this designation mean?
• Accountability designations and labels are one way that states and local education agencies provide information about how each school is supporting its students.
• They help stakeholders know where schools are excelling and where they have room to grow.
• But, they aren’t the only thing that matters. Beyond these ratings, parents, educators, and other stakeholders know a great deal about how their schools are performing.

What are these designations based on? Only test scores?
• These ratings and labels are not only based on test scores.
• They are based on multiple measures of student success, including graduation rates, progress for English learners in learning English, and other measures of school quality and student success.
• Many stakeholders provided input on the selection of these indicators through the ESSA planning process, and we look forward to continued engagement with a wide variety of stakeholders throughout implementation.

Do the designations mean some schools are “good” and others are “bad?”
• Designated schools are not “bad schools,” but they are schools that should receive priority consideration in support from the state and other partners.
• Through conversation sparked by the accountability ratings, these schools and districts have the opportunity to engage parents and the community in developing a plan to improve the school’s performance.
• Schools that receive high ratings deserve credit for their accomplishments, and the lessons they have learned need to be shared so that other schools can benefit.
If my school is designated for support or interventions, what will happen to it?
- Schools that are designated for support are eligible for additional funds, have the opportunity to engage parents and the community in developing a plan for improvement, and will receive additional support from the state and their district.
- These schools have room to improve but they are not “bad schools.”

What are my options for my child?
- Accountability ratings provide you with information about how your school and subgroups in that school are performing.
- You can use that information to engage with your school’s administrator or your student’s teachers to see what supports are available for individual students.

If my school is highlighted for “good” performance, will it receive additional funding? How does that recognition benefit my school?
- Your school should be congratulated for its performance and we encourage you to celebrate this success in your local community.
- While the school may not be rewarded monetarily, the state is enormously proud of each school’s success.
- The state will highlight the work of this school to inform our system of continuous school improvement.

School Designation

How are CSI schools designated?
- In general, CSI schools are those exhibiting challenges in academic achievement, academic growth, and at least one other area over a two-year span.
- The state considers performance on a wide variety of indicators, including those beyond test scores, to designate these schools.

How are schools with low-performing subgroups designated for A-TSI?
- A-TSI schools may not have the overall low performance, but they have one or more student groups of students who are falling behind.
- The state considers performance on a wide variety of indicators, including those beyond test scores, to designate these schools.

Where are these schools located? Are they concentrated in one or two districts within the state? Are there other commonalities (e.g., demographics, previous identification) among the designated schools?
- Pennsylvania’s designations include public schools in all corners of the state, and in local education agencies of every type – from large, urban systems to rural schools; designations include both traditional and charter schools.