

# A Policymaker's Guide to Understanding your State's ESSA Plan and ESSA Plan Reviews

**INTERACTIVE WORKSHEET**

# OVERVIEW

## A Policymaker's Guide to Understanding Your State's ESSA Plan | Interactive Worksheet

The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) was signed into law by President Barack Obama on December 10, 2015. ESSA reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was first enacted as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty." Since 1965, ESEA has represented the federal government's commitment to providing all of the nation's children with a fair, equitable, and high-quality education.

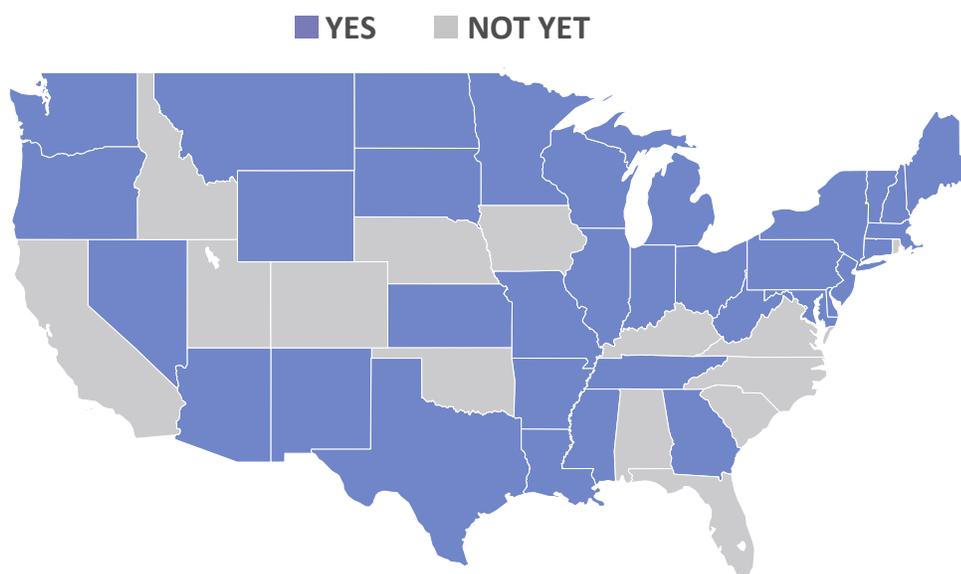
With the passage of ESSA, responsibility for making critical decisions related to education policy has shifted away from the federal government and back to the states. ESSA therefore presents a significant opportunity for state and local policymakers to refocus on how best to improve the nation's schools.

Looking for more background on ESSA and the federal education policies that came before? Check out the Hunt Institute's overview document, [\*The Every Student Succeeds Act: Opportunities & Responsibilities\*](#)

There have been a number of excellent publications on the different requirements of ESSA and how states are responding. We link to many of them in this document. But the purpose of this worksheet is to help you begin to dive into your state's plan and provide a place for you to note your thoughts, concerns, and ideas. We hope this document is a useful road map as you consider your state's unique response to the *Every Student Succeeds Act*.

As of March 2018, all 50 states and the District of Columbia have submitted consolidated plans to the U.S. Department of Education; **35** of those plans have been approved. *Has yours?*

**Take a look at the map below and click YES or NOT YET to move the appropriate section.**



## APPROVED! NOW WHAT?

Now that your state's plan has been approved, your state education agency will begin implementing the various components of the plan. But stakeholder engagement and collaboration shouldn't end with approval. We've designed this interactive worksheet to walk you through some of the key components of your state's plan and some of the major reviews done by different organizations. We also pose some questions and policy levers for you to consider moving forward.

Locate the approved version of your state's plan [here](#) and save the link in the space below for easy reference! *Click on your state. The approved version of your plan should be the first pdf linked on the page.*

### Setting the Vision

ESSA requires states to set long-term goals for improved academic achievement for all students and each subgroup. What's your state's vision?

**Helpful hint:** *Most states followed the USED's template for ESSA plan submission; look for this under Title I, Part A, Section 1.* If you are interested in taking a short cut, [check out Bellwether Education Partner's Independent Reviews here](#) — Select your state in the drop down menu, then "goals" on the left. (But do note that these documents are intended as reviews, not summaries.)

#### To Consider:

What's the time frame for the goals?

Are they aligned with other long-term goals or initiatives in your state?

Are they ambitious?  
Are they attainable?

From your perspective, what other policies or programs are needed to make these goals a reality?

What questions do you have?

#### What's in a Goal?

An Independent Review Panel organized by Bellwether Education Partners and the Collaborative for Student Success found the goals set by most states to be lackluster, noting that **"goals are largely untethered to the state's long-term vision, or other objective benchmark."**

One stand-out state in this area was Louisiana. **Reviewers gave Louisiana a 5 out of 5 rating** for this portion of the plan, noting that "Louisiana outlines an ambitious vision and attainable goals backed by clear data and a strong rationale supporting its interim targets."

## ACCOUNTABILITY UNDER ESSA

The accountability portion of the plan has probably gotten the most attention—it’s definitely the biggest shift from No Child Left Behind. Before you dive too deeply into your state’s plan, please take a look at The Hunt Institute's [School Accountability and the Every Student Succeeds Act](#), which outlines the requirements built into the law.

**Helpful hint:** Look for this in your state’s plan in Title 1, Part A, Section 4.1. If you’re using the Bellwether review, click on the tabs for indicators and academic progress, but remember these documents are intended as reviews, not summaries).

ESSA-REQUIRED INDICATOR	MEASURE/DESCRIPTION	WEIGHT
Academic Achievement		
Additional Measure of Academic Success		
Graduation Rate		
English Language Proficiency		
School Quality or Student Success		

### Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism was the most common measure chosen by states for the additional indicator of school quality and student success, with 37 plans including a measure in their accountability formulas. The most common definition, used by 27 of the states, is missing 10 percent or more of enrolled days. Chronic absenteeism is associated with lower student performance and in the higher grades is a warning sign for potential drop out.

With the significant interest in this measure, FutureEd at Georgetown University published a report analyzing the different uses of this measure under ESSA. To learn more, [please check out the report here](#).

**To Consider:**

Is this system a significant divergence from something you already have in place? If so, what policies/changes will be needed for full implementation?

How does your state weight growth vs accountability?

Does the accountability system allow for a “meaningful differentiation” among schools and districts?

Does this system ensure that schools are held accountable for the performance of *all* students? Why or why not?

**Moving Beyond Test Scores**

One component of the ESSA accountability plans that yielded significant discussion was the inclusion of the “School Quality or Student Success” measure. This requirement presented an opportunity for states to broaden their accountability measures beyond achievement and growth on standardized tests. So what did they choose? The American Institutes for Research compiled [two summaries](#) of the indicators used by states — each is listed below along with the number and names of states using the measure. (Note: Many, but not all, states used more than one measure of school quality and student success.)

College Readiness	Chronic Absenteeism	Conditions for Learning	Well-Rounded Education	On-Track to Graduation	Early Learning
<b>37</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>
AL, AK, AZ, AR, CA, CT, DE, FL, GA, ID, IL, IN, KY, LA, MD, MA, MI, MS, MT, NV, NH, NM, NY, NC, ND, OH, OK, PA, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VT, WA, WV, WY	AL, AK, AR, CA, CO, CT, DC, DE, GA, HI, IL, IN, KS, KY, ME, MD, MA, MI, MN, MO, MT, NE, NV, NJ, NM, NY, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, SD, TN VA, WA, WV, WI	CA, DC, GA, ID, IA, IL, KS, KY, MD, MT, NE, NV, NM, ND, RI, SC, WV	AK, AR, CA, CT, DC, GA, IL, KY, LA, MD, MI, NH, NY, VT, WY	AK, AR, CT, IL, LA, MD, MA, NV, OR, WA, WV	AK, OH

# SCHOOL TURNAROUND UNDER ESSA

Under ESSA, states are required to establish indicators of student achievement and success, incorporate those indicators into a system of meaningful annual differentiation, and use that system to identify schools in need of improvement. The law requires states to identify schools for comprehensive support and improvement (CSI) and those that will receive targeted support and improvement (TSI). For more information, please see The Hunt Institute's [The Every Student Succeeds Act and Low-Performing Schools](#).

**Helpful hint:** Look for this your state’s plan under Title I, Part A, Section 4.2.

	COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT AND INTERVENTION	TARGETED SUPPORT AND INTERVENTION
IDENTIFICATION		
SUPPORT		
EXIT CRITERIA		

<p><b>To Consider:</b></p> <p>Based on current performance, what schools/districts would be identified as TSI/CSI under this system in your state? Do these make sense based on your own knowledge of these schools?</p> <p>Will this plan identify schools with achievement gaps?</p> <p>How is this plan different than your existing support for low-performing schools?</p>	
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# INDEPENDENT REVIEWS

As the ESSA plans have been drafted and then submitted, many organizations and groups have reviewed the plans and offered their feedback on the proposals. We’ve selected several of these reviews for you to consider.

**Helpful hint:** Click on the link below for each review, scroll down and select your state. Was the overall review positive, neutral, or negative? What are the key takeaways from the review? Weaknesses? Strengths?

	OVERALL REVIEW	KEY TAKEAWAYS
<p><b><u><a href="#">Bellwether Education Partners</a></u></b>                      In partnership with the Collaborative for Student Success, Bellwether convened an independent peer review of state accountability plans.</p> <p>(Disclosure: Hunt Institute President &amp; CEO Dr. Javaid Siddiqi participated as a reviewer.)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Positive</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Neutral</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Negative</p>	
<p><b><u><a href="#">Thomas B. Fordham Institute</a></u></b>                      The Fordham Institute’s Rating the Ratings provides an analysis of all ESSA plans on 3 key objectives: Assigning annual ratings, encouraging schools to focus on all students, and fairly measuring and judging all schools, including those with high rates of poverty.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Positive</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Neutral</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Negative</p>	
<p><b><u><a href="#">The Alliance for Excellent Education</a></u></b>                      The Alliance has released equity dashboards for a number of states and intends to release the rest of the states soon, so check back if your state’s dashboard is not yet live!</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Positive</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Neutral</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Negative</p>	

**To Consider:**

Were the rankings in agreement?  
If not, where was there divergence?

What were the key strengths identified by the reviews?

What were the key weaknesses?

Were these weaknesses corrected in the final plan? If not, are there ways to address them during implementation?

If your state plan is not yet approved, [click here](#) to walk through the U.S. Department of Education feedback on your plan.

**Fordham Finds 8 States Lead the Rest**

While the Alliance and Bellwether did not release overall rankings of states, [Fordham found that the accountability systems proposed by eight states](#) rose to the top, being rated as strong on each of their three criteria:

- Arizona
- Arkansas
- Colorado
- Georgia
- Illinois
- New Hampshire
- Oklahoma
- Washington

## STILL IN REVIEW. NOW WHAT?

While your state’s plan may not yet have been approved, it’s still important to get a sense of what’s been included as you think about accountability in your state moving forward. We’ve designed this interactive worksheet to walk you through some of the key components of your state’s plan and some of the major reviews done by different organizations we also pose some questions and policy levers for you to consider moving forward.

Locate the submitted version of your state’s plan [here](#) and save the link for easy reference! *Click on your state. Under Submitted version, click on the first link.*

Make sure to keep the pdf open. Then click [here](#) to move to the next part of the worksheet. When you’re finished working through the review of your state’s submitted plan, come back to this page to walk through the U.S. Department of Education’s feedback.

## U.S. Department of Education Feedback

For plans that are not yet approved, the Department has provided feedback and/or requested clarification. Locate your state’s information [here](#) and save the link for easy reference! *Click on your state. Under “Letters to States,” click on the Interim feedback letter.*

### To Consider:

In general, are the issues raised clarifying or substantive?

What are the key concerns with the plan?

Do you agree with these assessments?

Do the key concerns align with any of the plan reviews?

Has your state developed next steps or a revised draft?  
What is the timeline?

Take a look at your SEA’s website to check for current status.



*An affiliate of the Duke University Sanford School of Public Policy*

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