



Updated January 31, 2018

## Elementary and Secondary Education Act: Overview of Title I-A Academic Accountability Provisions

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was comprehensively reauthorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; P.L. 114-95) on December 10, 2015. The ESSA made numerous changes to the standards, assessments, and academic accountability requirements that pertain to Title I-A of the ESEA. The new accountability requirements replaced or modified those enacted under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; P.L. 107-110).

Title I-A of the ESEA authorizes aid to local educational agencies (LEAs) for the education of disadvantaged children. Title I-A grants provide supplementary educational and related services to low-achieving and other students attending elementary and secondary schools with relatively high concentrations of students from low-income families. As a condition of receiving Title I-A funds, states, LEAs, and public schools must comply with numerous requirements related to standards, assessments, and academic accountability systems.

### State Plan

Each state educational agency (SEA) is required to submit a state plan delineating its academic accountability system, among other state plan requirements, for approval by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) in order to receive Title I-A funds. This plan must be developed by the SEA with “timely and meaningful consultation” with other education stakeholders, including governors, state boards of education, members of the state legislature, school staff, and parents. The plan must be peer-reviewed through a process established by the Secretary of Education (hereinafter referred to as the Secretary) and then approved by the Secretary. The state plan will remain in effect for the duration of the state’s participation in Title I-A and must be periodically reviewed and revised as necessary by the SEA to reflect any changes in the state’s strategies or programs under Title I-A. As part of this plan, SEAs are required to provide information on their standards, assessments, and academic accountability systems. SEAs were required to submit their state plans by April 3, 2017, or September 18, 2017.

### Standards

Each state receiving Title I-A funds is required to provide an assurance in its state plan that it has adopted challenging academic content standards and aligned academic achievement standards (hereinafter referred to as academic standards) in reading or language arts (RLA), mathematics, and science (and any other subject selected by the state). The achievement standards must include at least three levels of achievement. In addition, states are required to demonstrate that these academic standards are aligned with entrance requirements for credit-bearing coursework in the

state’s system of public higher education and relevant state career and technical education standards.

The state is permitted to adopt alternate academic achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities provided, among other requirements, that the standards are aligned with the challenging state content standards required for other students. The state is also required to demonstrate that it has adopted English language proficiency standards that are derived from the domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing; address the different proficiency levels of English learners; and are aligned with the challenging state academic standards.

The ESEA explicitly states that a state is not required to submit the challenging state academic standards, alternative academic standards, or English proficiency standards to the Secretary for review or approval. The Secretary also does not have the authority “to mandate, direct, control, coerce, or exercise any direction or supervision over any of the challenging State academic standards adopted or implemented by a State.”

### Assessments

Each state plan must demonstrate that the SEA, in consultation with LEAs, has implemented assessments in mathematics, RLA, and science. The mathematics and RLA assessments must be administered in each of grades 3-8 and once during high school. The science assessment must be administered once in grades 3-5, grades 6-9, and grades 10-12. Thus, each state must administer 17 assessments each school year, but no individual student will take more than 3 of these assessments in a given school year. The assessments must be aligned with the state academic standards.

A state may implement alternate assessments aligned with alternate academic achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. However, for each subject tested, no more than 1% of all students tested may take the alternate assessment. Each state plan must also demonstrate that the LEAs in the state will administer an annual assessment of English proficiency for all English learners that is aligned with the state’s English language proficiency standards.

### Accountability System

Prior to the enactment of the ESSA, under the provisions of NCLB the ESEA required SEAs to develop accountability systems that included a focus on schools and LEAs making adequate yearly progress (AYP) each year, based on several specified measures that included performance goals based

on requirements specified in law. Failure to make AYP for two consecutive years or more resulted in a specified system of outcome accountability requirements being applied to a school or LEA, regardless of whether the school or LEA failed to meet AYP for one group of students or multiple groups of students.

Under the ESEA as amended by the ESSA, SEAs have greater latitude than under NCLB in creating their academic accountability systems while maintaining the law’s focus on subgroup accountability. For accountability purposes, the ESEA continues to require separate accountability determinations to be made for four subgroups of students: (1) economically disadvantaged students, (2) students from major racial/ethnic groups, (3) children with disabilities, and (4) English learners. More specifically, SEAs have greater latitude in establishing systems for performance goals, measures of progress, and consequences to be applied to schools for low performance.

In its state plan, each SEA is required to describe its accountability system. The system must include state established long-term goals (and measures of interim progress) for all students and separately for each subgroup of students for academic achievement as measured by proficiency on the state RLA and mathematics assessments and high school graduation rates. In addition, the goals for subgroups of students who are behind on any of these measures must take into account the improvement needed to close statewide achievement gaps. Also, the system must include long-term goals (and measures of interim progress) for increases in the percentage of English learners making progress in achieving English proficiency, as defined by the state.

The state must then use a set of indicators that are based, in part, on the long-term goals established by the state to evaluate public schools. These indicators must include

1. public school student performance on the RLA and mathematics assessments as measured by student proficiency, and for high schools may also include a measure of student growth on such assessments;
2. for public elementary and secondary schools that are not high schools, the state must use a measure of student growth or another indicator that allows for “meaningful differentiation” in school performance;
3. for public high schools, the state must use graduation rates;
4. for all public schools in the state, progress in achieving English language proficiency must also be used as an indicator; and
5. for all public schools in the state, at least one indicator of school quality or student success (e.g., measure of student

engagement, postsecondary readiness, school climate).

Based on these indicators, the SEA must establish a system for annually “meaningfully differentiating” all public schools that gives substantial weight to each indicator but in the aggregate provides greater weight to the first four indicators than to the measure of school quality or student success indicator(s). The system must also identify any school in which any subgroup of students is “consistently underperforming,” as determined by the state. The results of this process are used to help determine which schools need additional support to improve student achievement.

SEAs are required to identify for comprehensive support and improvement (1) at least the lowest-performing 5% of all schools receiving Title I-A funds, (2) all public high schools failing to graduate 67% or more of their students, (3) schools required to implement additional targeted support (see below) that have not improved in a state-determined number of years, and (4) additional statewide categories of schools, at the state’s discretion. The LEAs in which schools are identified for comprehensive support and improvement are required to work with stakeholders to develop a school improvement plan that, among other requirements, must include evidence-based interventions, be based on a school-level needs assessment, and identify resource inequities. An LEA may also offer students enrolled in a school identified for comprehensive support the option to transfer to another public school in the LEA. If a school does not improve within a state-determined number of years (no more than four years), the school must be subject to more rigorous state-determined actions.

States are required to identify for targeted support and improvement any school in which a subgroup of students is consistently underperforming. Each of these schools is required to develop and implement a plan to improve student outcomes that includes evidence-based interventions. For a school in which one or more subgroups is performing at a level that is reflective of an entire school’s performance would result in its identification for comprehensive support, the school must be identified for additional targeted support and improvement activities, which must include an identification of resource inequities. If a school identified for additional targeted support does not improve within a state-determined number of years, the state is required to identify the school for comprehensive support and improvement.

In its state plan, the SEA must also provide an explanation of how the state will factor into its accountability system the requirement that 95% of all students and each subgroup of students participate in the required assessments.

---

**Rebecca R. Skinner**, Specialist in Education Policy

**IF10556**

## **Disclaimer**

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.