



Common Questions: ESSA Accountability & Support

The following are answers to common questions about Iowa's new system for school accountability and support under the Every Student Succeeds Act.

Accountability Determinations/School Identification

1. Why does Iowa have a new system for school accountability and support?

Iowa and other states developed systems for school accountability and support following passage of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, which replaced the No Child Left Behind Act. ESSA maintains a focus on school accountability and equity for all students while giving states and local school districts more ownership over systems of accountability and support. Iowa's system was developed with broad input, fits the state's context, and is designed to support schools rather than punish them.

2. How did Iowa come up with this system?

Iowa's system for accountability and support as outlined in the state's ESSA plan was developed and revised with more than a year of feedback from a cross-section of education stakeholders.

This outreach effort included 18 public meetings across the state, meetings of a state advisory committee and 11 education work teams, convening of focus groups and a collection of written comments through online surveys, email and mail.

3. Why does this system identify/single out schools?

ESSA requires states to identify schools that need the most support, for the purpose of ensuring students have the same opportunities for success that exist for students in other schools. We support this approach in Iowa in the interest of transparency, accountability and support for ongoing improvement of schools.

4. How does the system identify schools that need the most support?

Each school receives an overall score based on performance on a set of accountability measures (see Question 16 for an explanation of these measures): Student participation on state assessments, academic achievement (proficiency and average scale score), student academic growth, graduation rate, progress in achieving English language proficiency, and a student survey (Conditions for Learning). Schools also receive a score for each subgroup of students, such as students from low-income backgrounds. Subgroups must have 20 or more students to receive a score.

Based on these scores, some schools will be identified for support and improvement (Comprehensive or Targeted).

5. How are schools identified for Comprehensive/Targeted Support and Improvement?

Comprehensive schools perform in the lowest 5 percent of Title I schools in Iowa or are high schools with a graduation rate of less than 67.1 percent. Generally, these

schools need assistance and support based on the performance of the entire student population.

Targeted schools are any public school with one or more underperforming subgroup of students (students who are eligible for free and reduced-price meals, English learners, students with disabilities, and students by racial/ethnic minority group). This means one or more subgroup performs as low as the lowest 5 percent of schools.

6. Why is there such a large emphasis on growth in this new accountability system?

It was clear from stakeholder feedback that Iowans wanted a change from a previous accountability system that emphasized proficiency. Iowa's new accountability system places the greatest emphasis on growth because students come to school with different starting points, and schools deserve recognition for making significant progress.

7. What exactly is the student growth measure, and how will this growth measure change when Iowa administers a new state assessment?

Iowa's new growth measure is based on student growth percentile, which compares students with their academic peers (students at the same grade level with similar assessment scores) over a period of three years. With a range of 1 to 99, higher numbers represent higher growth and lower numbers represent lower growth. For example, a student growth percentile of 85 means a student showed more growth than 85 percent of his/her academic peers. One benefit of student growth percentile is that it can calculate growth through a transition in state assessments, which Iowa experienced in the spring of 2019.

8. If my school is identified as Comprehensive or Targeted, does it mean it is a bad school?

No, it simply means these are schools that need help and support to improve, and Iowa has the right system in place to provide that support. It is important to understand a school's local context and improvement efforts that are underway.

9. What are identified schools required to do?

School districts are responsible for developing and implementing, in partnership with stakeholders, a school-level improvement plan that includes at least one evidence-based intervention. Districts with schools receiving Comprehensive or Targeted supports must also conduct a resource equity review, which examines how funds and other resources are distributed across school buildings.

The state approves and monitors plans for Comprehensive schools; school districts will approve and monitor plans for Targeted schools.

10. What supports will be provided to Targeted and Comprehensive schools?

Support comes through the state's Differentiated Accountability system and includes identifying causes of performance issues, strategies and interventions to put in place, and an evaluation of what's working. This is a continuous improvement model.

Title I schools are eligible for additional federal funds that can be used for professional learning and other activities to help them implement their improvement plans.

11. How does my school get out of Comprehensive or Targeted status?

Schools exit Comprehensive and Targeted status if, after three years, they have demonstrated consistent improvement.

12. What happens to schools that don't improve?

Comprehensive schools that do not meet exit criteria within three years are "extended comprehensive schools," which require more involvement from the state. These schools must implement an evidence-based, state-approved improvement strategy. The schools will further be required to direct the state's established Teacher Leadership and Compensation resources for coaching and professional learning toward successful implementation of those evidence-based strategies.

13. What about schools that are not identified for Targeted or Comprehensive Support and Improvement?

The majority of Iowa's schools will not be identified for support and improvement. However, they are subject to annual reporting requirements, and their scores will be available in the Iowa School Performance Profiles.

These schools deserve credit for their accomplishments and can be a resource for schools that are working to improve.

Iowa School Performance Profiles

14. What are the Iowa School Performance Profiles?

The Iowa School Performance Profiles show how schools are performing on multiple measures, including those measures that count toward their accountability determination under ESSA. The website meets both federal (ESSA) and state requirements for publishing report cards for school performance.

The initial version of the website, launched in December 2018, included each school's accountability scores, such as graduation rates, and specified schools that were identified for additional support and improvement based on their performance.

The site was updated in May 2019 to include additional data required by ESSA (such as student suspensions and expulsions), new tools for users, and data and ratings from the former Iowa School Report Card, which was developed to meet a 2013 state legislative requirement.

15. What happened to the Iowa School Report Card?

Measures and ratings from the Iowa School Report Card were folded into the Iowa School Performance Profiles, with the goal of having one report card for Iowa that meets both state and federal requirements. The Iowa School Report Card is no longer a stand-alone website.

16. What accountability measures are included in the Iowa School Performance Profiles?

The measures used in Iowa's school accountability determinations are:

- **Student Participation on State Assessments:** Requires that a minimum of 95 percent of a school's enrollment participate in the annual state

assessment. The 95 percent rule also applies to a school's student subgroups.

- **Academic Achievement:**

- **Proficiency:** Examines the percentage of students in a school who are proficient in math and reading based on assessment results.
- **Average Scale Score:** Provides information about the average performance of students in reading and mathematics in a school. It is a broader look at overall achievement of all students in a school.
- **Student Growth:** Examines student growth by looking at assessment scores over time to determine whether a student performed better or worse than his/her academic peers (students at the same grade level with similar scores).
- **Graduation Rate (High Schools):** Determines the percent of students who graduate from high school in four or five years.
- **Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency:** For students whose first language is not English, this measures a student's progress in obtaining English language proficiency across the domains of reading, writing, listening and speaking. This measure is based on Iowa's English language proficiency assessment, called ELPA21.
- **Conditions for Learning:** Measures school safety, engagement and learning environment based on a survey of students in grades 5 through 12.

17. What other metrics are included in the Iowa School Performance Profiles?

Metrics that are required, but do not count toward a school's accountability score, are:

- **Student Attendance:** Shows the average daily attendance rate of students across the school year (total number of days attended divided by the total number of days enrolled).
- **Chronic Absenteeism:** Shows the percentage of students who missed 10 percent or more school days for any reason, excused or unexcused.
- **Percent of Students Assessed:** Shows the percentage of students who took a reading or math assessment.
- **Postsecondary Readiness:** Includes multiple pathways through which students can demonstrate readiness for success beyond high school.
- **Staff Retention:** Reports the percentage of teachers, administrators and other licensed professionals who remain employed in the same school building over consecutive years.
- **Suspension and Expulsion:** Provides information about the number of student suspension and expulsion incidents in the prior school year.
- **Progress on State Goals:** Includes the measurements of interim progress toward meeting the long-term goals for academic achievement, graduation rates, and English language proficiency set forth in the state's ESSA plan.

18. What happens if a school does not have the minimum group size for the Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency measure?

In these cases, the 10 percent weighting will be distributed among all other remaining measures, except for participation rate.

19. Will the Iowa School Performance Profiles rate schools?

Yes. The spring 2019 version of the Iowa School Performance Profiles folds in data and ratings from the former Iowa School Report Card. Ratings are: Exceptional, High Performing, Commendable, Acceptable, Needs Improvement, and Priority. School accountability scores are used to determine school ratings using the same cut score used to identify the lowest 5 percent of schools under ESSA (Comprehensive schools).

20. Does this scoring apply to all schools in Iowa?

Only public schools receive scores.

21. How will the state use the data?

The Iowa School Performance Profiles website functions as a public reporting tool; the state uses the scores to apply state ratings, to identify schools for support and improvement (Comprehensive and Targeted) and to provide support to identified schools.

22. How can parents and schools use this online tool?

Educators, parents and other stakeholders can use the information to celebrate achievements, to pinpoint areas for improvement, and to ask questions. School leaders also can use the information in their improvement plans.

23. Where do I get help in navigating the Iowa School Performance Profiles?

A user guide has been developed and is available on the Iowa School Performance Profiles site, www.iaschoolperformance.gov.

Conditions for Learning Survey

24. What is the Conditions for Learning measure?

The measure is based on results of a student survey about safety, engagement and learning environment. The survey of students in grades 3 through 12 focuses on issues ranging from student safety to relationships to how school rules are enforced. School scores currently reflect survey responses from the 2017-18 school year, when only students in grades 5 through 12 took the survey. The 2018-19 survey results will be available in the fall of 2019.

25. How was the survey developed?

The survey became a valid and reliable tool through Iowa's work with the U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Supportive Schools grant.

26. Is this the same as the Iowa Youth Survey?

No, the Conditions for Learning survey is a stand-alone survey that will be administered every spring.

27. What level of information will be displayed for this measure?

For the Conditions for Learning measure, the Iowa School Performance Profiles will display the overall scores for schools in each domain area, as well as scores for each student subgroup within a school.

28. Is it fair to grade a school based on student perceptions?

ESSA gave states an opportunity to expand the way we look at accountability beyond test scores and academic achievement to consider school performance more holistically. This is important because over-reliance on achievement measures to evaluate school performance fails to recognize schools that are producing substantial growth.

29. If my child's school fared poorly on this measure, does it mean the school is unsafe or unsupportive?

Not necessarily. We know that schools are working hard to provide safe, supportive learning environments for children. The Conditions for Learning measure provides important, actionable feedback to schools and communities, using a valid and reliable survey. This measure also includes students in efforts to improve learning conditions.

30. How do you protect the privacy of those surveyed students?

The survey is confidential, anonymous and voluntary.

31. Where can I find the survey questions?

Contact the Iowa Department of Education for a list of survey questions:
essa@iowa.gov