

## **CRITICAL AREA OUTLINE: ASSESSMENT**

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) presents various opportunities for state education agencies (SEAs) to rethink how they best serve students, by providing new flexibility from federal constraints. States have already committed to establishing or adopting high-quality systems of assessments<sup>1</sup>, including both formative and summative assessments, based on college- and career-ready (CCR) standards. These assessments will **align** to CCR standards, **report** annually on each student's progress toward readiness, adhere to best **test administration** practices, and be **accessible** to all students. It is important to consider how to leverage the opportunities presented by the new flexibility in the law to achieve the state strategic vision and priorities. With much of the decision-making now in the hands of state leaders, there is increased freedom to determine innovative solutions to drive reform in critical content areas. The purpose of this document is to assist state senior staff as they implement the state assessment components of ESSA.

### **STATE VISION**

How does your Chief's vision impact the decisions you will have to make? Ensuring you have a clear understanding of the outcomes your Chief is prioritizing will help to inform your work and how you engage with others across the state education agency (SEA) to move toward a coherent ESSA transition strategy. Overarching questions you may want to consider as you begin work:

- Do I know my Chief's overall state strategic vision?
- What is most important to my chief?
- What does my chief hope to achieve with this area of work?

### **OPPORTUNITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Standards and assessments are the foundation for the accountability system. Getting these elements right is critical and it is important that stakeholders both internally and externally know the state's long-term plans as well as the steps that will be taken in the near term to get to the bigger vision. While the assessment elements in ESSA are somewhat more discrete than some other parts of the law, the transition presents state leaders with an opportunity to evaluate the comprehensive assessment system and to contemplate how information from that system helps to achieve your overall vision. Key components and questions you may want to consider include:

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<sup>1</sup> See the Council of Chief State School Officers' [Criteria for Procuring and Evaluating High-Quality Assessments](#).

For assessment, ESSA requires:	Implications/Questions
<p><b>Alignment with higher education.</b> All assessments and standards must be “aligned with challenging state academic standards” that correlate to entrance requirements for credit-bearing coursework in the state’s public higher education system and to relevant career and technical education standards.</p>	
<p><b>Annual assessments.</b> States must continue to test all students on statewide assessments in the following areas: reading/language arts and math every year in grades 3-8 and once in high school (9-12); and science once in each grade span (3-5, 6-9, 10-12). These assessments must be aligned to the state’s challenging academic standards.</p>	<p><i>Implications:</i> Because this requirement is not new, many states will be familiar with this construct and with the process by which the U.S. Department of Education (USED) reviews state assessments, the assessment peer review process. For many states, current state tests may meet this requirement. States that are not changing assessments in 2015-2016 will go through USED’s peer review process in April or June of 2016.</p> <p>As noted below, states also will have new options in terms of the types of assessments that constitute their annual summative assessments. As the types of assessments evolve, it is anticipated that this same level of review will be applied to the potential use of new forms of assessments such as portfolio-based or performance-based, which ESSA enables. (Please see <i>Alternate Formats</i> below.)</p> <p><i>Question:</i> What role do statewide assessments play in your comprehensive system of high-quality assessments?</p>

<p><b>Disaggregation.</b> Disaggregation of assessment results by student subgroups continues to be required.</p>	<p><i>Implications:</i> State test results must continue to be disaggregated for reporting purposes. Because state report cards will need to include disaggregation for three additional subgroups (homeless students, foster care students, and military-connected students), state assessment systems also will need to enable disaggregation for those subgroups, in addition to the ones required in the past.</p> <p><i>Question:</i> How are you working with your accountability team to analyze the assessment data to set short- and long-term goals for all subgroups?</p>
<p><b>Alternate Assessments.</b> An alternate assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities is required. This assessment must be based on alternate academic achievement standards aligned with challenging State academic standards and, unless a waiver is granted, is subject to a 1% student participation cap for each required subject. NOTE: ESSA indicates that states “may” develop an alternate assessment, but this remains a requirement under IDEA.</p> <p><i>From IDEA: “A State (or, in the case of a district-wide assessment, an LEA) must develop and implement alternate assessments and guidelines for the participation of children with disabilities in alternate assessments for those children who cannot participate in regular assessments, even with accommodations, as indicated in their respective IEPs.”</i></p>	<p><i>Implications:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While states are not allowed to test more than 1% of the student population with the alternate assessment, they are still required to determine how they will provide additional oversight over LEAs that administer these assessments, should they be assessing more than 1% of their total student population via these assessments.</li> <li>• The state cannot impose a local cap on participation, but an LEA exceeding the cap must submit information to the State justifying the need to exceed the cap.</li> <li>• As part of the IEP process, parents must be clearly informed that their child’s achievement being measured on alternate achievement standards, and “how participation in such assessments may delay or otherwise affect the student from completing the requirements for a regular high school diploma.” However, this “does not preclude a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities who takes an alternate assessment ... from attempting to complete the requirements for a regular high school diploma.”</li> </ul>

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	<p><i>Question:</i> What is your state’s strategy for coordinating this cap across the state?</p>
<p><b>Participation rate.</b> ESSA requires a 95% participation rate of all students and student subgroups in the state assessment program.</p>	<p><i>Implications:</i> Although ESSA requires that participation rate be taken into account as part of a state’s accountability system, it does not specify how the 95% criteria should be applied. Unless USED regulates on this issue, it will be up to states to decide the consequences for non-participation.</p> <p><i>Questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What incentives do you want to create to drive participation rates?</li> <li>• How do you build those into your accountability system?</li> </ul>
<p><b>English Language Proficiency (ELP) Assessment.</b> A statewide test of acquisition of English proficiency for English Language Learners is required. This test must be aligned to the state’s ELP standards.</p>	<p><i>Implications:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• States will need to determine if their ELP assessments align with their ELP standards, and revise those assessments if they do not. In addition, the ELP standards must be aligned to the state’s academic standards. There are several options about how to transition these scores into the state accountability system.</li> <li>• In addition to ELP assessments, ESSA continues the requirement that states’ reading/language arts, math and science assessments provide for the inclusion of English Learners (ELs), who must be assessed in a valid and reliable manner and provided appropriate accommodations (including, to the extent practicable, assessments in the language and form most likely to yield accurate information on what those students know and can do in the content area assessed) until they have attained English proficiency as measured by the ELP assessments administered in the state.</li> </ul>

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	<p>Questions: What is your overall assessment strategy for EL students? How does that impact your accountability system (please see <i>Critical Area Outline: English Language Learners/Title III Transition</i> for more discussion of this issue.)</p>
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In addition, ESSA <i>allows</i> for the following:	Implications/Questions
<p><b>Alternate formats.</b> Assessments <i>may</i> “be partially delivered in the form of portfolios, projects, or extended performance tasks.”</p>	
<p><b>Single summative or multiple interim.</b> States <i>may</i> decide if assessments will be administered through a single summative assessment or “through multiple statewide interim assessments during the course of the academic year that result in a single summative score that provides valid, reliable, and transparent information on student achievement or growth.”</p>	<p><i>Implications:</i> Assessments may be administered through a single summative assessment or via multiple statewide interim assessments during the course of the academic year that result in a single summative score. Regardless of the format, the assessments must meet the same standards for technical quality.</p>
<p><b>8<sup>th</sup> grade assessments.</b> States <i>may</i> decide if they will exempt 8<sup>th</sup> graders who take advanced mathematics in middle school from the regular 8<sup>th</sup> grade state assessment.</p>	<p><i>Implications:</i> Under ESSA, this allowance is limited to 8<sup>th</sup> grade math, although under waivers some states had similar alternatives for students taking high school English tests in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade in place of state-developed 8<sup>th</sup> grade tests. Under this provision, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade advanced math scores must still be included in the accountability system.</p> <p><i>Questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What impact will this decision have on your high school assessment?</li> <li>• How will you assess these students in high schools?</li> </ul>

<p><b>Locally selected, nationally recognized assessments.</b> States <i>may</i> decide to make nationally recognized high school assessments available for local selection. If any district seeks to use a locally selected assessment, states are required to establish technical criteria to determine if any such assessments meet the requirement.</p>	<p><i>Implications:</i> States can choose to let districts give a nationally recognized assessment — like the SAT or ACT — in place of the statewide high school assessment. Under this provision, the state has to make sure that the nationally recognized assessment is aligned to state standards, meets the same technical quality requirements as the state assessment, and generates information that is comparable to the information generated by the state test. The test scores also would need to be used in the state’s accountability system.</p> <p><i>Questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will these tests be factored into your state accountability system?</li> <li>• What impact will this have on your overall assessment system?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Computer-adaptive assessments.</b> States <i>may</i> decide if they want to develop and administer computer-adaptive assessments.</p>	<p><i>Questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does this allow students on both ends of the performance scale to better demonstrate learning?</li> <li>• What safeguards will you put in place to ensure all students are progressing toward high standards?</li> <li>• What procedures will you put in place to ensure the technical quality and comparability of the nationally recognized tests?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Assessment audit.</b> States <i>may</i> choose to seek additional funds from the U.S. Secretary of Education to conduct an audit of their assessment system.</p>	<p><i>Implications:</i> To support states in this area, CCSSO developed and published <a href="#">Comprehensive Statewide Assessment Systems: A Framework for the Role of the State Education Agency in Improving Quality and Reducing Burden</a>. This resource is intended to support and guide state leaders as they continue to evaluate their state assessment systems and move towards a comprehensive high-quality assessment systems.</p> <p>States will need to decide if they will seek additional funds from the Secretary to conduct</p>

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	<p>an audit of their assessment system. A state that receives an audit grant will have to provide at least 20% of that grant to LEAs. Interested states should begin thinking about the procedures they will put in place for local subgrants.</p> <p><i>Questions<sup>2</sup>:</i> To help frame the conversation, states can consider several key questions to guide efforts at all levels. For example: (1) What are the key elements of a high-quality system of assessments that can best and most efficiently advance college and career ready teaching and learning? (2) What current assessments are being administered at all levels and which, if any, can be eliminated or reduced because they are low-quality, duplicative, and/or do not serve a core purpose as part of a comprehensive, high-quality system of assessments? And ultimately, (3) what can and should be done to enhance the system of assessments to improve quality and build a more comprehensive system that can best measure the full range of knowledge and skills, improve teaching, and advance growth of all students toward college and career ready outcomes? Having a shared vision for the work will help to inform every step of the process including what data is collected, how assessments are analyzed, and how decisions are made.</p>
<p><b>Cap on testing time.</b> States <i>may</i> set a limit on the aggregate amount of time devoted to the administration of assessments for each grade, expressed as a percentage of annual instructional hours. States need to determine when they would make this decision.</p>	<p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do the results of an assessment audit inform your decision about a possible cap on testing time?</li> <li>• How is quality of assessment taken into consideration as part of this analysis?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Innovative Assessment Pilots.</b> (See <i>Innovative Assessment Pilot</i> outline.)</p>	

<sup>2</sup> These questions are derived from [Comprehensive Statewide Assessment Systems: A Framework for the Role of the State Education Agency in Improving Quality and Reducing Burden](#).

## STRATEGY

### CROSS-CUTTING ACTIONS

As the state develops its set of strategies, you may want to consider the following key questions that connect all work teams in your state related to implementing ESSA pertaining to assessments. We have categorized these key questions by topic: 1) strategic questions, 2) stakeholder engagement, 3) communications and messaging, 4) advocacy, and 5) data use and technology.

#### Strategic Questions

1. Can you explain what you want to achieve to any audience?
2. What would success look like for each strategy you plan to develop and by when?
3. What is your risk assessment? What are the barriers?
4. How will you ensure your strategies endure the test of time? What is the plan for continuous improvement?

#### Stakeholder Engagement

Your SEA will likely have an overall engagement strategy for working with stakeholders in the ESSA transition process. Within that, we anticipate there will be specific stakeholders who will be most relevant to assessment systems. Constituency outreach *today* to inform key stakeholders about the new law related to accountability and to begin gathering ideas for implementation. Be sure to coordinate with the overall agency strategy before proceeding. Questions to consider:

1. Do you have an existing coalition, or do you need to build one?
  - If you need to build one, have you considered all possible stakeholders?
    - Examples: Business, philanthropy, civil rights leaders, parents, teachers, school administrators, district administrators, etc.
    - Which foundation and corporate partners work in this area in your state?
    - Have you engaged civil rights leaders or groups representing traditionally underrepresented students, such as students with disabilities, English language learners, and communities of color?
  - How are you working with other states and/or CCSSO to share best practices on implementing ESSA pertaining to ELs?

#### Communications and Messaging

When a new law passes, teachers, parents, principals, superintendents, and legislators want to know, “What’s changing today?” ESSA has been branded as a law that provides tremendous state flexibility, but requirements still exist to which states and local districts must adhere. Both of these issues present a communications and messaging challenge that states should be proactive in discussing with key stakeholders.

1. Have you identified the audience(s) necessary for ESSA implementation in your state? (Examples: media, legislators, teachers, school administrators, business community, civil rights leaders)
2. How will you communicate with each audience throughout the implementation process? Consider:

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- Do you have a central location for providing updates on your website?
  - How are you being transparent with the public throughout the process?
  - Have you established regular updates and/or meetings with key groups?
3. Have you developed key messages for communications within and throughout the state education agency?
  4. How can you work with your communications team to identify what assessment-related messages need to be shared when and with whom?

#### Advocacy:

ESSA provides increased flexibility and complex implementation challenges; therefore, advocacy strategies for implementation efforts at the state and federal levels are necessary to ensure successful transition to the new law. Integrating advocacy and stakeholder engagement activities into early implementation planning will allow state education leaders to realize their vision. Questions to consider:

1. Does your state need to make changes to state policy, legislation, or regulation to implement ESSA pertaining to assessments?
2. How does ESSA implementation timeline align with state legislative calendar or State Board meetings?
3. Does your agency, or local school districts, need additional state resources to carry out the work?
4. What areas of the law require clarification from the U.S. Department of Education, and which should be clarified at the state level?

#### Data Use and Technology Supports

Data and technology enable the success of a state education agency's policy priorities by supporting the delivery of services and applications. Information collected by state agencies shines a light on student outcomes and supports better decision making at all levels. The passage of ESSA provides states with an excellent opportunity to think strategically and holistically about the data implications across program areas and the necessity of technology supports for implementation. Questions to consider:

1. How will you use data to make better decisions and support better student outcomes?
2. What questions do you need to answer to determine the success of your agency's vision?
3. How will you share data with your key stakeholders to ensure transparency and accountability?
4. What technology supports do you need in place to deliver on your strategic vision?

## IMPLEMENTATION

#### Structure

1. What staff, time and money will need to be dedicated to this endeavor? What additional resources might you need?
2. Can you repurpose some resources/staff?
3. Who is the single person responsible for this strategy's success?
4. Is there a team of people who will support your point person?
5. What time, money and technology will be needed for successful implementation of this strategy?
6. Do you have data and information systems in place to track outcomes and measure success?
7. Who are the key stakeholders you need to help implement this strategy?

Fiscal Considerations under ESSA

The Fiscal Year 2016 appropriations act clarified that the ESSA provisions affecting formula grants will not take effect until the 2017–2018 school year. The formula funds (for Titles I, II, and III, etc.) that states will receive in July 2016 and use mainly in 2016–2017 will be carried out under No Child Left Behind. ESSA provides the Secretary of Education with the authority to “take such steps as are necessary for the orderly transition” from NCLB to ESSA, so the U.S. Department of Education (ED) will likely issue additional guidance on the transition in the coming months.

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