

# LOUISIANA



*Louisiana's accountability system rewards schools that help students achieve at an advanced level. But because growth for proficient students doesn't factor into summative school ratings, there is still an incentive for schools to ignore their high achievers.*

## THE PURPOSE OF THIS ANALYSIS

The Every Student Succeeds Act grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than its predecessor, No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Consequently, states now have an opportunity to design school rating systems that improve upon the NCLB model, especially when it comes to high achievers.

NCLB meant well (as did many state accountability systems that preceded it), but it had a pernicious flaw. Namely, it created strong incentives for schools to focus all their energy on helping low-performing students get over a modest “proficiency” bar, while ignoring the educational needs of their high achievers, who were likely to pass state reading and math tests regardless of what happened in the classroom. This may be why the United States has seen significant achievement growth for its lowest-performing students over the last twenty years but smaller gains for its top students.

Starting in 2011, former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan offered waivers to states that wanted the flexibility to redesign their accountability systems. In particular, states were allowed to incorporate the use of real student growth measures into their school determinations. This was important for a variety of reasons. First, growth measures more accurately evaluate schools' impact on student achievement than proficiency rates, which are strongly correlated with student demographics, family circumstance, and prior achievement. But just as significantly, well-designed growth measures can eliminate the temptation for schools to ignore their high achievers.

ESSA maintains NCLB's requirement that states assess students annually in grades 3–8 and once in high school, as well as the mandate that states adopt accountability systems that lead to ratings for schools. These systems must include four types of indicators: academic achievement; another academic indicator, which can include student growth for elementary and middle schools; growth towards English proficiency for English language learners; and at least one other valid, reliable indicator of school quality or student success. Each of the academic indicators (1–3) must carry “substantial” weight and, in the aggregate, must count “much more” than the fourth.

Here we examine whether Louisiana’s accountability system prioritizes high achievers. We specifically evaluate the state’s system for rating school performance during the 2014-2015 school year. We do not examine the quality of Louisiana’s standards, tests, or sanctions for low performance.

This analysis also illustrates how states can seize the opportunity under ESSA to redesign their accountability systems and prioritize high achievers.

This last point is especially important because many state accountability systems are currently in flux. In part, that’s because of recent changes allowed by ESEA waivers, as well as the coming changes driven by ESSA implementation. But it’s also because states across the country recently moved to new, tougher assessments linked to their new, tougher standards.

States may think we’re being premature in evaluating their systems during this time of massive change. Please understand that our primary objective is to identify the design features of an accountability system that works for all students—which we hope will become the prevailing model now that ESEA is reauthorized and states’ testing regimes are becoming stable once again.

Our focus here is on rating systems for elementary and middle schools. A separate analysis will examine the same issues for high school accountability.

## HOW STATES CAN PRIORITIZE HIGH ACHIEVERS IN THEIR SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

In our view, states can and should take four steps to ensure that the needs of high achievers are prioritized under ESSA:

1. **For the first academic indicator required by ESSA (“academic achievement”), give schools incentives for getting more students to an “advanced” level.** Under ESSA, states will continue to track the percentage of students who attain proficiency on state tests. They should also give schools incentives for getting students to an advanced level (such as level four on Smarter Balanced or level five on PARCC). For example, they might create an achievement index that gives schools partial credit for getting students to “basic,” full credit for getting students to “proficient,” and additional credit for getting students to “advanced.” (It’s not entirely clear from the Department of Education’s proposed regulations whether this will be allowed, though we don’t see anything in the law prohibiting it.)
2. **For the second academic indicator expected by ESSA (student growth), rate schools using a “true growth model,” i.e., one that looks at the progress of individual students at all achievement levels and not just those who are low-performing or below the “proficient” line.** Regrettably, some states still don’t consider individual student growth, or else they use a “growth-to-proficiency system” that continues to encourage schools to ignore the needs of students above (or far above) the proficient level. Using true growth models—such as “value added” or the “growth percentile method”—for all students is much preferred.

3. **Include “gifted students” (or “high achieving students”) as a subgroup in the state’s accountability system and report results for them separately.** States can signal that high achievers matter by making them a visible, trackable “subgroup,” akin to special education students or English language learners, and publishing school ratings for their progress and/or achievement. (Obviously, it makes little sense to simply report that high achievers are high-achieving. But whether they are making strong growth is quite relevant. Alternatively, states might publish results for students labeled as “gifted,” though that opens up a can of worms about how that label is applied.)
  
4. **When determining summative school ratings, make growth—across the achievement spectrum—count the most.** Finally, the Department of Education’s proposed regulations require states to combine multiple factors into summative school ratings, probably through an index. Each of the three academic indicators (achievement, growth, and progress toward English proficiency) must carry “substantial” weight. But in our view, states should (and, under ESSA, are free to) make growth matter the most (50 percent or more of a school’s total score). Otherwise, schools will continue to face an incentive to ignore their high-performers. (States that don’t combine their indicators into a summative school rating receive a “Not Applicable” here.)

### DOES LOUISIANA’S ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM PRIORITIZE HIGH ACHIEVERS?



INDICATOR	RATINGS	NOTES
1. Does the state rate schools’ “academic achievement” using a model that gives additional credit for students achieving at an “advanced” level?		Louisiana gives additional credit for students achieving at an “advanced” level. (See Exhibit A.)
2. Does the state rate schools’ growth using a model that looks at the progress of all individual students, not just those below the “proficient” line?		Louisiana uses a multivariate value-added model. However, this model is only used to rate the growth of students who are below the standard for proficiency. <sup>1</sup>
3. Does the state’s accountability system include “gifted students,” “high-achieving students,” or the like as a subgroup and report their results separately?		Louisiana does not include “gifted students,” “high-achieving students,” or the like as a subgroup or report their results separately. (See Exhibit B.)
4. When calculating summative school ratings, does “growth for all students” count for at least half of the rating?		Although schools can earn bonus points for achieving exceptional growth with non-proficient students, “growth for all students” does not count toward a school’s summative rating. (See Exhibit A.)

EXHIBIT A<sup>2</sup>

**SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SCORE**

School Performance Scores are based on student achievement, academic indicators and measures of career and college readiness, such as Carnegie credits earned through 9th grade, graduation rates, and earning Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Dual Enrollment.

- **Elementary schools (K-6):** 100 percent of the school grade is based on student achievement on annual assessments in English language arts, math, science, and social studies. Schools may also earn points for significant improvement with students who are academically behind.
- **Middle schools (7-8):** 95 percent of the school grade is based on student achievement on annual assessments with the final 5 percent based on credits earned through the end of students' 9th grade year. Schools may also earn points for significant improvement with students who are academically behind.
- **High schools (9-12):** Half of the school grade is based on student achievement (25 percent on the ACT and 25 percent on End-of-Course assessments). Half of the school grade is based on graduation (25 percent on the graduation index, which rewards achievements like Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate exam credit, and 25 percent on the cohort graduation rate, the percentage of students graduating in four years). Schools may also earn points for significant improvement with students who are academically behind.

**ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

Elementary and middle schools earn points for student achievement on annual assessments in English language arts, math, science and social studies. Total points are divided by the total number of tests to calculate the School Performance Score. In elementary school, these points comprise 100% of the school grade. In schools with an 8th grade, these points comprise 95% of the school grade. Schools may also earn points for significant improvement with students who are academically behind.

Student Achievement Score	Points Per Student
Level 5/Advanced	150
Level 4/Mastery	125
Level 3/Basic	100
Level 2/Approaching Basic	0
Level 1/Unsatisfactory	0

NOTE: English language arts and math scores are weighted double in calculations for school performance scores. Schools may earn points for students scoring Approaching Basic or Unsatisfactory in the prior year through **progress points** (see definition below).

**SCHOOLS WITH 8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE**

Schools with 8th grade also earn points for the number of credits each student accumulates by the end of 9th grade. Total points are divided by the number of students to calculate a school average. These points comprise 5% of the school grade.

Course Credits	Points Per Student
6	150
5.5	125
5	100
4.5	75
4	50
3.5	25
3 or less	0
3 <sup>rd</sup> year 8 <sup>th</sup> grade student	0
Dropout	0

EXHIBIT B<sup>3</sup>

**ARMSTRONG MIDDLE SCHOOL**  
2014-2015 • Acadia Parish • Grades 6-8 • 001001

**D**

383 Enrolled • 8% Special Education • 82% Economically Disadvantaged

SPS = 53.5

HOW DID STUDENTS PERFORM ON STATE ASSESSMENTS?

Students performing at Basic may need additional support to be fully prepared for the next level of studies. Students performing at Mastery and above have met or exceeded the expectations, and are well prepared for the next level of studies. By 2025, A-rated schools must have an average performance of Mastery.

SCORE	SCHOOL	DISTRICT	STATE
MASTERY +	14%	28%	27%
BASIC +	45%	67%	65%

NOTE: The table above includes students who take LAA 1. View how their performance is measured [here](#).

HOW DID DIFFERENT GROUPS OF STUDENTS PERFORM?

SCORE	MINORITY STUDENTS			STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES			ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS		
	SCHOOL	DISTRICT	STATE	SCHOOL	DISTRICT	STATE	SCHOOL	DISTRICT	STATE
MASTERY +	8%	15%	18%	<5%	7%	10%	11%	21%	19%
BASIC +	35%	49%	55%	20%	32%	35%	40%	61%	57%


HOW MANY CREDITS DID STUDENTS EARN BY THE END OF FRESHMAN YEAR?

Schools with grade 8 are accountable for the number of credits earned and the number of students who dropout by the end of grade 9.

CREDITS	SCHOOL	DISTRICT	STATE
6 +	75%	86%	83%

DID THIS SCHOOL MAKE PROGRESS WITH STUDENTS WHO STRUGGLED ACADEMICALLY?

Schools earn a maximum of 10 progress points for students previously non-proficient but who exceeded expectations in the current year.

	NON-PROFICIENT STUDENTS	EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS	DISTRICT	STATE	TOTAL POINTS EARNED	14/15 vs 13/14
ELA	138	43%	50%	50%	0.0	 DECLINING
MATH	128	38%	48%	49%		

2013-2014		2014-2015		ADDITIONAL PERFORMANCE INFORMATION	DATA CENTER
D	SPS 64.5	D	SPS 53.5		

During transition years (2013-2016), expectations for all students have been raised by increasing the quality of ELA and math assessments and phasing out of the LAA 2 assessments. During this transitional learning year, a curve policy is in place to ensure that the distribution of letter grades remains stable. More information about transition policies is available [here](#).

**ENDNOTES**

1. “Value-Added Model,” Louisiana Department of Education, accessed May 31, 2016, <http://www.louisianabelieves.com/teaching/value-added-model>.
2. “School Performance Score,” Louisiana Department of Education, accessed May 31, 2016, <http://www.louisianabelieves.com/accountability/school-performance-scores>.
3. “Armstrong Middle School,” Louisiana Department of Education, accessed May 31, 2016, <http://www.louisianabelieves.com/data/reportcards/2015/>.