

# **RATING THE RATINGS**

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**AN ANALYSIS OF THE 51 ESSA  
ACCOUNTABILITY PLANS**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Back in July, the Fordham Institute analyzed the first seventeen accountability plans submitted to the U.S. Department of Education under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). We found that, for the most part, states were moving in a positive direction under the new law. In fact, we judged seven of the seventeen state ratings systems to be good or great.

Now we're back, with an expanded analysis that adds the other thirty-four plans, as submitted to Washington in September and October. Looking across the United States, we see similarly positive signs—and can declare with some confidence that the country is finally turning the page on the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era.

As is well known, ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB.<sup>1</sup> Hence, state leaders have an opportunity to overhaul or even replace their school rating systems.

In our view, three of the most important improvements that states should make are to ensure that their accountability systems:

1. Assign annual ratings to schools that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public;
2. Encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and
3. Fairly measure and judge all schools, including those with high rates of poverty.

Although a state's ESSA plan can be examined and evaluated from many perspectives—and others are already engaged in that process—we base our reviews on the three desirable features noted just above, and we do so using the rubric in Table ES-1.

**Table ES-1. Rubric for rating state accountability systems**

Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive			Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers			Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty		
Weak	Medium	Strong	Weak	Medium	Strong	Weak	Medium	Strong

Table ES-2 shows our findings for the ESSA plans of all fifty states and the District of Columbia. According to this analysis, twenty-one of the fifty-one proposed school rating systems are either good or great. Only three—California's, Idaho's, and North Dakota's—are weak on all dimensions.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Table ES-2. State results**<sup>2</sup>

	Clear Labels	Focus on All Students	Fair to All Schools
Alabama	Strong	Medium	Medium
Alaska	Strong	Medium	Medium
Arizona	Strong	Strong	Strong
Arkansas	Strong	Strong	Strong
California	Weak	Weak	Weak
Colorado	Strong	Strong	Strong
Connecticut	Strong	Strong	Medium
Delaware	Medium	Weak	Medium
D.C.	Strong	Strong	Medium
Florida	Strong	Weak	Strong
Georgia	Strong	Strong	Strong
Hawaii	Strong	Medium	Medium
Idaho	Weak	Weak	Weak
Illinois	Strong	Strong	Strong
Indiana	Strong	Medium	Medium
Iowa	Strong	Strong	Medium
Kansas	Weak	Weak	Strong
Kentucky	Strong	Strong	Medium
Louisiana	Strong	Strong	Weak
Maine	Medium	Medium	Medium
Maryland	Strong	Medium	Weak
Massachusetts	Strong	Strong	Weak
Michigan	Weak	Weak	Medium
Minnesota	Weak	Weak	Medium
Mississippi	Strong	Weak	Strong
Missouri	Strong	Strong	Medium
Montana	N/A	Medium	Medium
Nebraska	Strong	Medium	Medium
Nevada	Strong	Weak	Medium
New Hampshire	Strong	Strong	Strong
New Jersey	Medium	Medium	Medium
New Mexico	Strong	Medium	Medium
New York	Medium	Strong	N/A
North Carolina	Strong	Weak	Weak
North Dakota	Weak	Weak	Weak
Ohio	Strong	Medium	Strong
Oklahoma	Strong	Strong	Strong

**Table ES-2. State results (continued)**

	Clear Labels	Focus on All Students	Fair to All Schools
Oregon	Weak	Medium	Medium
Pennsylvania	Weak	Strong	Strong
Rhode Island	Strong	Strong	Medium
South Carolina	Strong	Strong	Medium
South Dakota	Strong	Strong	Medium
Tennessee	Strong	Medium	Strong
Texas	Strong	Weak	Strong
Utah	Strong	Medium	Strong
Vermont	Strong	Strong	Medium
Virginia	Weak	Weak	Strong
Washington	Strong	Strong	Strong
West Virginia	Medium	Strong	Weak
Wisconsin	Strong	Strong	Medium
Wyoming	Medium	Weak	Strong

The proposed accountability systems of eight states—**Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, and Washington**—get top marks from us, with strong grades across all three categories. They propose to use ratings that clearly and intuitively convey to all observers and constituencies how well a given school is performing. They signal that all students matter by ensuring that at least 50 percent of schools’ annual ratings are composed of measures of growth for all students and/or measures of achievement that look beyond proficiency rates. And they’re fair to all schools—including those with high rates of poverty—by virtue of making growth measures of any kind constitute at least half of schools’ summative ratings.

Other key findings:

- State systems are particularly **strong** when it comes to assigning clear and intuitive labels. Thirty-five plans—more than two-thirds of them!—received a strong mark for using either A–F grades, five-star systems, or user-friendly numerical systems. Another six earned a **medium**, while just nine are **weak**.
- The country is also doing much better than before in signaling that every child is important—a huge improvement on NCLB-era systems, which encouraged a focus on “bubble kids”—those just below states’ proficiency cutoffs. Twenty-three states earned **strong** grades on this objective, and another fourteen earned **medium** marks.
- We see somewhat less progress when it comes to making accountability systems fair to high-poverty schools. Only eighteen states are **strong** here. But twenty-four others get to **medium**, which is still an improvement over NCLB.

Although many states included elements in their school rating systems that we don't love, it's welcome news that so many have moved away from several key flaws of NCLB. We're also encouraged that most states didn't throw the baby out with the bath water. They could have given up on school ratings entirely, except for identifying their worst schools, which federal law requires them to do. Granted, nine did just that. It appears that four of these states plan to do nothing but distinguish their very worst schools from all of the rest, therefore conveying almost nothing about how well most schools are performing. The other five at least plan to provide a "dashboard" that comprises myriad data points, though no bottom line. But that still means that 80 percent of states made their grading system clear for parents and the public, in most cases clearer than what we had under NCLB. Indeed, taken as a whole, these countrywide results represent a huge victory for education reformers—and for American schoolchildren.

### **Acknowledgments**

This report was made possible through the support of our sister organization, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. We are grateful to Chester E. Finn, Jr., Amber M. Northern, and David Griffith for providing feedback on various drafts; to Alyssa Schwenk for her role in disseminating the final product; to Jonathan Lutton for developing our report's layout; and to Pamela Tatz and Shannon Last for copyediting.

Any errors are ours alone.

# INTRODUCTION

Critics aren't wrong when they say that much of what's contained in state plans to implement the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is blather and paperwork.<sup>3</sup> This was, at its heart, an elaborate compliance exercise, and most of the pretty words that states wrote down don't amount to much. That is why many of the recent and forthcoming reviews of these plans will be somewhat misguided in their focus on components such as long-term state promises, most of which represent pie-in-the-sky.

But one part of ESSA plans will almost surely matter a great deal: the design of state accountability systems—in particular, the ratings or labels that states place on their public schools, the components and weightings that go into those ratings, and the methodologies used to develop them. Rigorous and well-respected studies from the NCLB era demonstrated that such ratings can and do drive behavior in schools (although not always in a healthy direction).<sup>4</sup>

ESSA grants states greater authority over their school accountability regimes than did NCLB. Hence states have an opportunity to design significantly improved school ratings (see *A note on accountability and state autonomy*). In our view, three of the most important improvements that states can make to their accountability systems going forward are to ensure that those systems (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all of their students, not just low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty. Let us explain why.

## **A note on accountability and state autonomy**

This analysis is based on a trio of objectives that we believe states ought to take seriously when designing their school accountability systems. We're clear about those objectives and why they're important. But we don't claim that there's any one "best way" to construct these frameworks. ESSA gives substantial authority back to the states, which is where it belongs, both rationally and constitutionally. States should be lauded for taking advantage of this newfound freedom to design systems that best fit the needs of their students, families, and communities.

No matter the route that state leaders choose, however, there are tradeoffs. Focusing on all students—as we urge—means that schools and teachers may pay a little less attention to their low performers, for example. We understand that risk, but there's also a great risk to the country's future when we neglect the education of higher-achieving students, especially those growing up in poverty. This is a normative value, and we don't assume that everyone will share it. That's the case with every principle that informs our analysis and recommendations.

## **1**

### **Clear and intuitive ratings**

For more than two decades now, school ratings have been at the heart of state accountability systems—and for good reason. Easy-to-understand labels, such as A–F letter grades, provide clear signal to parents, citizens, and educators about the quality of a school and can nudge systems toward improvement. “Dashboards”—which present lots of data points but no bottom line—are great complements to labels, especially when teams sit down to determine how to take a school to the next level, but they are no replacement. Furthermore, there's no excuse for states to assign labels that are impossible to parse, such as “not identified” or “universal support.”

That strikes us as an Orwellian approach to keep interested parties in the dark about current school quality. Therefore, states ought to assign annual ratings to schools and ensure that these ratings are clear and intuitive for educators, parents, and the general public.<sup>5</sup>

### 2

#### **A focus on all students**

NCLB meant well (as did many pre-ESSA state accountability systems) 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 pretty much ignoring everyone else. This approach led schools to focus on “bubble kids,” those just below the proficiency cutoff, to the detriment of other pupils.<sup>6</sup> Among those neglected were both high achievers—those already over the proficiency threshold—and exceptionally low achievers, for whom proficiency seemed beyond the best efforts of teachers and schools (even when the bar wasn’t high).

We understand the impulse to make low-performing students a priority. Many schools need to do far better by them and in the days before NCLB their needs were often ignored. But they aren’t the only children who matter. Acting as if they are sends signals to schools that students who are already proficient don’t deserve to have their education maximized. Such neglect is inequitable. It’s also bad for social mobility and harmful to the country’s long-term prosperity. The students most harmed by this are able pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>7</sup> They depend far more than upper-middle-class students on the public education system to support them. So if they don’t receive the attention from educators that they—like all children—deserve, many will fall by the wayside, destined by circumstances beyond their control never to realize their full potential.<sup>8</sup>

The country also needs such children to be highly educated to ensure its long-term competitiveness, security, and innovation. These boys and girls hold great promise for making major advances in science, technology, medicine, the humanities, and much more. America’s economic vitality depends heavily on the quality and productivity of our human capital and its capacity for innovation.<sup>9</sup>

### 3

#### **Fairness for high-poverty schools**

Finally, we think it’s imperative that state ratings be fair to high-poverty schools. Under the NCLB-era accountability regimes of many states, nearly every school serving a high proportion of low-income students was eventually designated as failing.<sup>10</sup> Although it’s no secret that too many high-poverty schools are ineffective, it’s absurd to signal that this is the case with nearly all of them.

This happened because most of the NCLB-era measures of school performance—especially proficiency and graduation rates—are strongly correlated with prior achievement and student demographics. Such metrics are more reflective of the students that a school serves—and what they have or haven’t learned before stepping foot in a given school—than the effectiveness of their instruction.<sup>11</sup>

Thankfully, ESSA allows states to move on and to focus a school’s metrics more on what’s under the control of educators: how much students learn while in their classrooms (see *Growth measures as a proxy for fairness to high-poverty schools*). States that embrace this approach should find that at least some of their high-poverty schools earn good to excellent ratings—because they deserve them. If that’s never the case, the rating system is still broken.

### **Organization of this report**

States must describe their proposed accountability systems in “consolidated plans” that they submit to the U.S. Department of Education for review.<sup>12</sup> The first deadline was in April 2017, when sixteen states and the District of Columbia submitted their plans.<sup>13</sup> The second deadline, which is when all remaining states and territories submitted their plans, was in September 2017.

This report examines how well these plans fulfill the three objectives that we delineate above. It does not examine the quality of states’ standards, tests, planned interventions in low-performing schools, or other elements of their ESSA plans.

The data in this report reflect information that was publicly available as of October 15, 2017, compiled from state plans as published on the U.S. Department of Education website.

For simplicity’s sake, our focus here is on state rating systems for elementary and middle schools.

# METHODS

As explained above, we believe that a strong state accountability system (1) assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourages schools to focus on all students; and (3) measures and judges all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether the proposed accountability systems described in the plans submitted to U.S. Department of Education accomplish these three objectives, we evaluate them in the following way. A state plan is then designated “Strong,” “Medium,” or “Weak” on each objective.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Annual school ratings should immediately convey to all observers how well a given school is performing. Straightforward approaches like A–F grades and five-star systems do this very well. Text labels that are easy to understand have some merit, but these often fail to communicate clearly. (For example, is “highly effective” the best possible rating in a state that uses that label?) And systems that offer numerous data points with no bottom line (for example, “data dashboards”) or that employ murky text labels do neither. Therefore, this analysis assesses states in following manner:

- **Strong:** A–F, five stars, or the equivalent
- **Medium:** Text labels that are easy to understand
- **Weak:** Myriad data points with no bottom line, grades for only the lowest performing schools, or text labels that aren’t clear regarding a school’s quality

2

## Does the rating system encourage a focus on all students?

There are two primary ways that state accountability systems can encourage schools to focus on all students and not just low performers. First, they can measure achievement in a way that gives schools credit for raising the performance of students along the entire achievement spectrum, by using average scale scores (see Glossary) or a performance index. For example, a state might create an index that gives schools partial credit for getting students to a basic level of achievement, full credit for getting students to proficiency, and additional credit for getting students to an advanced level.

Second, when calculating annual school ratings, growth of all students (as opposed to growth to a specific achievement standard, like proficiency, or growth only for low performers) from one year to the next is given substantial weight (see Glossary for an explanation of measures of growth for all). Again, this puts the focus on all kids, instead of just some.

Hence state plans are assessed as follows:

- **Strong:** At least 50 percent of the state’s accountability system comprises one or more of the following academic indicators: 1) performance index; (2) average scale scores; and (3) growth for all students.

- **Medium:** Between 33 and 50 percent of the state’s accountability system comprises one or more of the following academic indicators: 1) performance index; (2) average scale scores; and (3) growth for all students.
- **Weak:** Less than 33 percent of the state’s accountability system comprises one or more of the following academic indicators: 1) performance index; (2) average scale scores; and (3) growth for all students.

### 3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Across all plans that have been submitted to the U.S. Department of Education under ESSA, indicators of student achievement and student growth are the two biggest components of accountability systems for schools. States are required to measure achievement, but they should not overweight it when calculating school ratings, even if they’re using a performance index or scale scores. That’s because all achievement measures are strongly correlated with pupils’ prior achievement—and since low-income students tend to enter school far behind their peers, high-poverty schools are likely to fare poorly under such measures, no matter how good the school and its teachers are.<sup>14</sup>

Growth measures, however, quantify changes in achievement over time, independent of whether students start as high or low performers; hence they’re less correlated with poverty<sup>15</sup> and unrelated to prior achievement (see the *Glossary* for an explanation of various types of growth measures). Annual school ratings should, above all, accurately assess the true performance of schools, and that can’t be done unless it’s possible for high-performing, high-poverty schools to actually earn positive ratings (see *Growth measures as a proxy for fairness to high-poverty schools*). Growth measures should therefore constitute the majority of summative ratings, and we evaluate state plans in the following manner:

- **Strong:** Academic growth of any kind constitutes at least 50 percent of a state’s accountability system.
- **Medium:** Academic growth of any kind constitutes between 33 and 50 percent of a state’s summative rating system.
- **Weak:** Academic growth of any kind constitutes less than 33 percent of a state’s summative rating system.

\*\*\*

Using these criteria and the rubric in Table 1, we rate the proposed accountability systems for the fifty-one plans submitted to the U.S. Department of Education.

**Table 1. Rubric for rating state accountability systems**

Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive			Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers			Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty		
Weak	Medium	Strong	Weak	Medium	Strong	Weak	Medium	Strong

### **Growth measures as a proxy for fairness to high-poverty schools**

The optimal way to determine whether a given state’s accountability system fairly measures the performance of high-poverty schools would be to rigorously measure how closely correlated with poverty is each indicator that the state proposes to use. One could then combine those correlation coefficients to determine how strongly correlated that state’s total accountability framework is with poverty—and, therefore, how fairly it measures high-poverty schools.

Unfortunately, no such correlation measurements exist for many of the indicators that states have proposed; and, even if they did, states’ explanations of their indicators in their consolidated state plans are often not detailed enough to determine whether any extant research can be justifiably applied.

But we do know a few things. First, “status measures” in general—and proficiency rates in particular—are strongly correlated with poverty.<sup>16</sup> Second, growth measures are much less correlated with poverty than are achievement measures.<sup>17</sup> Third, achievement and growth are by far the two biggest components of state accountability frameworks for K–8 schools.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the more states focus on growth instead of achievement, the fairer they will be to high-poverty schools.

# NATIONAL RESULTS

Table 2 shows the results for all fifty-one plans that have been submitted to the U.S. Department of Education. We find that twenty-one of the fifty-one plans propose school rating systems are either good or great—earning at least two strong and one medium grades. Although this means that many states included elements in their school rating systems that aren't ideal, most have nevertheless moved in the right direction, improving the systems in place under NCLB that focused exclusively on proficiency. The plans submitted under ESSA will, as a whole, expand the focus of accountability to include more students, and will more fairly and accurately assess the quality of schools with high rates of poverty.

**Table 2. State results** <sup>19</sup>

	Clear Labels	Focus on All Students	Fair to All Schools
Alabama	Strong	Medium	Medium
Alaska	Strong	Medium	Medium
Arizona	Strong	Strong	Strong
Arkansas	Strong	Strong	Strong
California	Weak	Weak	Weak
Colorado	Strong	Strong	Strong
Connecticut	Strong	Strong	Medium
Delaware	Medium	Weak	Medium
D.C.	Strong	Strong	Medium
Florida	Strong	Weak	Strong
Georgia	Strong	Strong	Strong
Hawaii	Strong	Medium	Medium
Idaho	Weak	Weak	Weak
Illinois	Strong	Strong	Strong
Indiana	Strong	Medium	Medium
Iowa	Strong	Strong	Medium
Kansas	Weak	Weak	Strong
Kentucky	Strong	Strong	Medium
Louisiana	Strong	Strong	Weak
Maine	Medium	Medium	Medium
Maryland	Strong	Medium	Weak
Massachusetts	Strong	Strong	Weak
Michigan	Weak	Weak	Medium
Minnesota	Weak	Weak	Medium
Mississippi	Strong	Weak	Strong
Missouri	Strong	Strong	Medium
Montana	N/A	Medium	Medium
Nebraska	Strong	Medium	Medium

**Table 2. State results (continued)**

	Clear Labels	Focus on All Students	Fair to All Schools
Nevada	Strong	Weak	Medium
New Hampshire	Strong	Strong	Strong
New Jersey	Medium	Medium	Medium
New Mexico	Strong	Medium	Medium
New York	Medium	Strong	N/A
North Carolina	Strong	Weak	Weak
North Dakota	Weak	Weak	Weak
Ohio	Strong	Medium	Strong
Oklahoma	Strong	Strong	Strong
Oregon	Weak	Medium	Medium
Pennsylvania	Weak	Strong	Strong
Rhode Island	Strong	Strong	Medium
South Carolina	Strong	Strong	Medium
South Dakota	Strong	Strong	Medium
Tennessee	Strong	Medium	Strong
Texas	Strong	Weak	Strong
Utah	Strong	Medium	Strong
Vermont	Strong	Strong	Medium
Virginia	Weak	Weak	Strong
Washington	Strong	Strong	Strong
West Virginia	Medium	Strong	Weak
Wisconsin	Strong	Strong	Medium
Wyoming	Medium	Weak	Strong

The proposed accountability systems of eight states—**Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, and Washington**—are the best, receiving strong grades across the board. They intend to use ratings that clearly and intuitively convey to all observers how well a given school is performing. They signal that all students matter by ensuring that at least half of schools’ annual ratings are composed of measures of growth for all students and/or measures of achievement that look beyond proficiency rates. And they’re fair to all schools—including those with high rates of poverty—by making growth measures constitute at least half of schools’ summative ratings.

On the flip side, **California, Idaho, and North Dakota** are the worst of the bunch. They all rely on proficiency rates, don’t emphasize student growth, and propose using a dashboard-like approach with myriad data points and no bottom line for reporting school quality to parents, beyond identifying their very worst schools, as required by federal law.

Additionally, the plans submitted by **Montana and New York** prevent us from using our methodology to assign all three grades. Montana hasn’t decided which summative ratings to use, and New York does not provide enough detail in its plan to determine the importance of growth in its system.

## How plans submitted by the first deadline compare to those submitted by the second

Earlier this year, after sixteen states and the District of Columbia submitted plans to the U.S. Department of Education by the first of two deadlines, we reviewed those proposals using the same methodology that we use in this broader analysis of all fifty-one plans.

That first group served as guinea pigs. Although many of them included elements in their school rating systems that we found problematic or worrying, we were encouraged that nearly half of them were either good or great by our reckoning—earning at least two strong and one medium grades—and only one missed the mark entirely, earning nothing but weak grades.

That first group signified much improvement over the accountability regimens of the NCLB era, making us hopeful that the thirty-four states that opted for the second deadline would follow suit.

It turns out that our hope was fulfilled. The second group is, for the most part, similar to the first. Twelve plans in the second group are good or great by our reckoning, and only two miss the mark entirely. Indeed, sorted by **strong, medium, and weak** ratings for our three individual objectives, the similarities are even more apparent: In the first group, 45 percent of the ratings assigned were **strong**, 35 percent were **medium**, and 20 percent were **weak**; in the second group, 52 percent of the ratings assigned are **strong**, 25 percent **medium**, and 21 percent **weak**. (The other 2 percent can't be judged, due to unfinished plan components or lack of detail.)

### 1

## Annual ratings

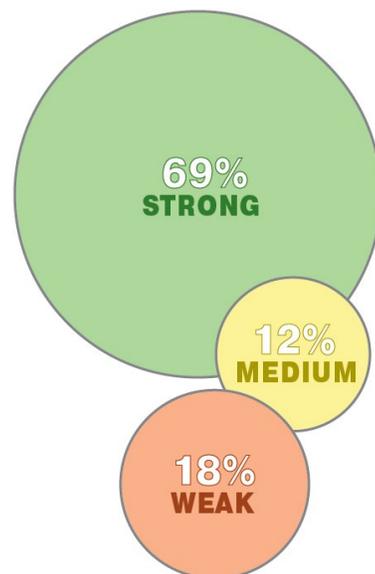
In more than two-thirds of states, the annual school ratings are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public (see Figure 1).

Thirty-five plans—69 percent—received a **strong** grade by using clear and intuitive ratings that immediately convey to all observers how well a given school is performing. Twelve of these exemplary states use letter grades. Eighteen rate schools on a numerical-point system. And five more use a system of zero-to-five stars.

Six states designed systems of intuitive text labels—that is, they use words that are easy to understand. These have some merit but often fail to communicate important information. (For example, is “highly effective” the best possible rating in a state that uses that label?) These states—comprising 12 percent of plans—therefore received **medium** grades.

Nine more (18 percent) earn **weak** grades. It appears that four of these states plan to do nothing but distinguish their very worst schools from all of the rest, therefore conveying almost nothing about how well most schools are performing. The other five at least plan to provide a “dashboard” that includes myriad data points, though no bottom line.

**Figure 1. State grades for the clarity and intuitiveness of their annual school ratings** <sup>20</sup>



## NATIONAL RESULTS

Montana received a mark of **not applicable** here because it is still deciding between summative ratings that are text based, which would likely earn it a medium grade, and those that are similar to A–F, five-star, and numeric ratings, which would earn it a strong grade.

2

### Signaling that all students matter, not just low performers

We can report some good news here: Thirty-seven of the fifty-one accountability systems range from good to great when it comes to signaling that all students matter—a huge improvement over NCLB (see Figure 2).

Of these thirty-seven plans, twenty-three earned a grade of **strong**.<sup>22</sup> In each, at least 50 percent of schools' annual ratings are made up of one or more of the following academic indicators: 1) performance index; (2) average scale scores; and (3) growth for all students.

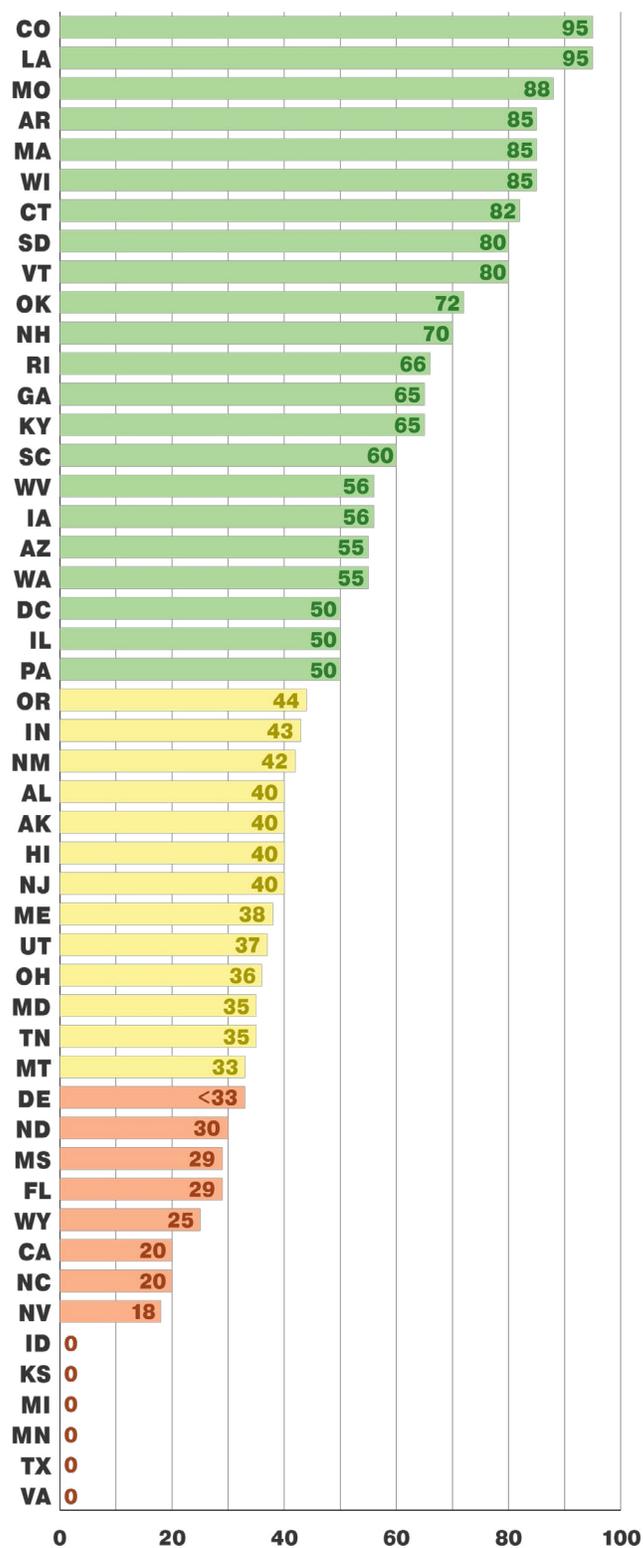
Fourteen states received **medium** marks—eight of which carried over NCLB's ill-chosen use of proficiency rates.<sup>23</sup> And growth for all students in these fourteen locales counts for between 16 percent and 45 percent of annual summative ratings.

**Weak** grades went to fourteen other states—for keeping proficiency rates as their measure of achievement and also downplaying growth for all students. In these jurisdictions, one may justifiably worry whether everyone above the proficiency line will continue to be ignored.

### Fairness to high-poverty schools

The news here is also encouraging.

**Figure 2. Percentage of school ratings that comprise performance indices, scale scores, and growth for all**<sup>21</sup>



## NATIONAL RESULTS

3

Most of the proposed accountability systems are much fairer to high-poverty schools than were state systems in place under NCLB (see Figure 3).

As previously stated, one of NCLB’s pernicious flaws was how unfairly it treated high-poverty schools. Because proficiency rates are strongly correlated with prior achievement—and so many children growing up in poverty tend to enter school so far behind—under the previous federal law, schools with many low-income pupils had little chance of receiving a positive school rating, regardless of how hard teachers and staff worked to boost their learning.

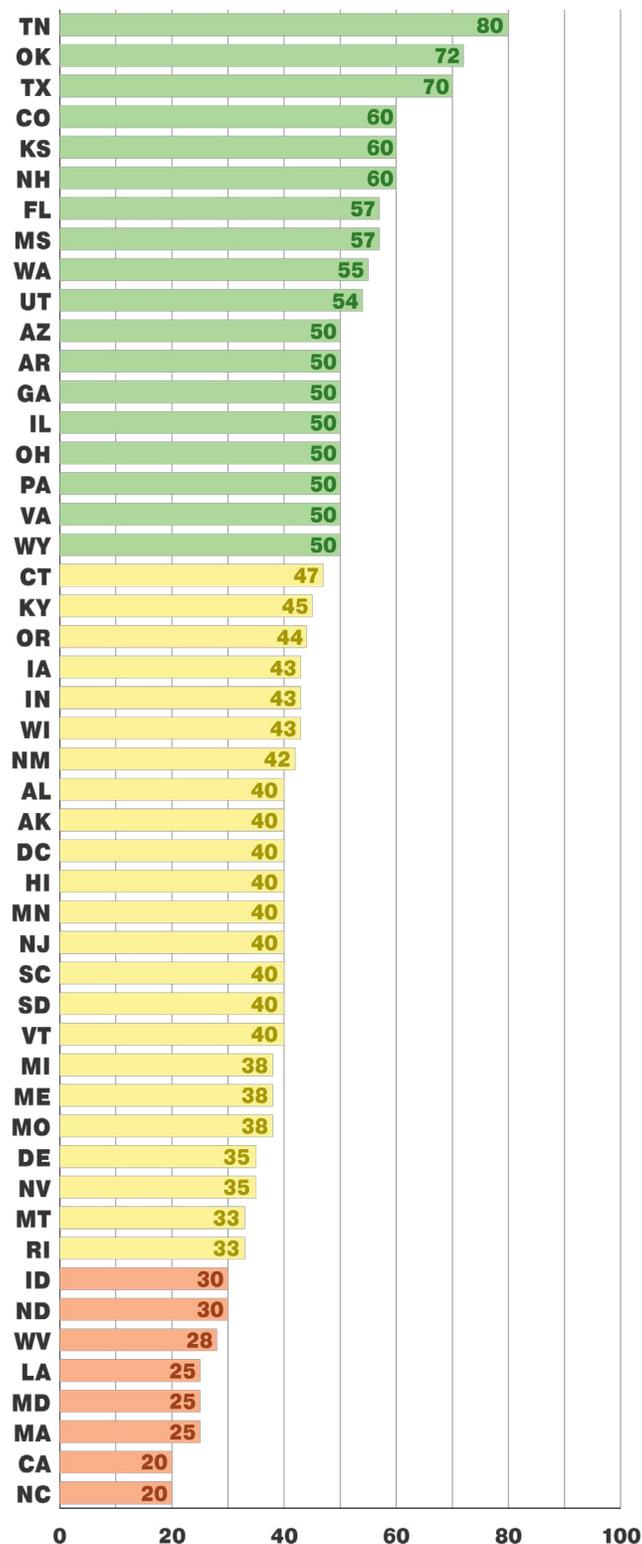
It is therefore encouraging that eighteen states, or 35 percent, received ratings of **strong** on this indicator. In these jurisdictions, growth of any kind—growth for all, growth to proficiency, growth for a subgroup of students, and so forth—constitutes at least half of schools’ annual summative rating. We predict therefore that high-performing, high-poverty schools in these jurisdictions should be capable of earning positive ratings—a significant turnaround from the NCLB era.

Twenty-four others received a rating of **medium**, comprising 47 percent of plans. Growth of any kind combines between 33 percent and 47 percent of schools’ annual ratings.

Sadly, the systems in eight states are still lacking in this area, and they all received **weak** grades for assigning measures of growth weights of less than 33 percent.

As in the first objective, one state (New York) received a mark of **not applicable** because it does not provide enough detail in its plan to determine the importance of growth in its system.

**Figure 3. Percentage of school ratings that comprises growth of any kind** <sup>24</sup>



# CLOSING THOUGHTS

When Congress enacted the Every Student Succeeds Act and shifted power back to the states, many education reformers voiced concern that states would give up on rigorous accountability systems. “Federal pressure is a hard thing for people to swallow,” said Conor Williams, a senior researcher at New America, “but this law doesn’t give enough federal pressure for enough schools and doesn’t define the guardrails we need.”<sup>25</sup>

This worry wasn’t unreasonable. Conventional wisdom indicated that the opponents of results-based accountability—the teachers unions and other educator groups especially—wield enormous power in the states. With many of the “guardrails” of No Child Left Behind removed, nothing would keep vested interests in the education status quo from dismantling consequential accountability. In correcting NCLB’s flaws, states might throw the baby out with the bathwater.

So we’re happy to report that such fears were mostly unfounded. While there’s still plenty about accountability systems in many states to criticize—and implementation challenges lie ahead for all of them—on paper they represent more of an improvement on NCLB-era systems than a repudiation of them. Most notably, even though states had the choice to skip rating most schools entirely, the majority decided to keep doing so, and most actually made their ratings clearer and easier to understand. On that score at least, the reformers won, and the establishment lost—big time.

And can anyone be unhappy that states have, on the whole, made their systems fairer to kids well above and below the proficiency line—and fairer to high-poverty schools, by incorporating growth into their measures? In our view, most states should even more aggressively emphasize academic progress. But the systems submitted still represent a nontrivial gain.

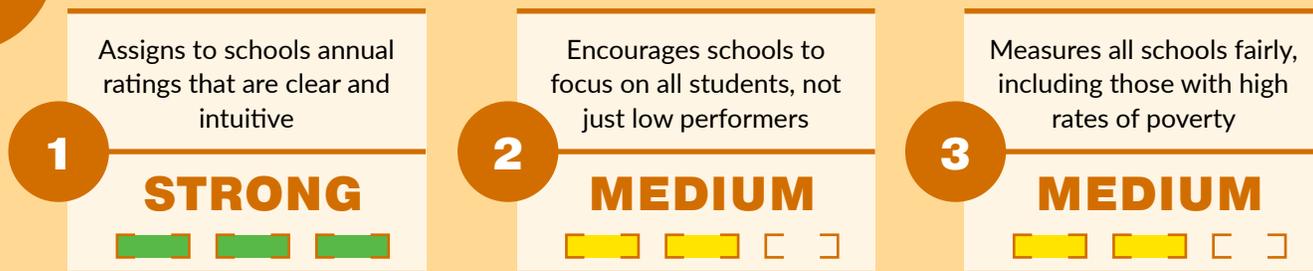
So now what? None of these ESSA plans is set in stone, and we hope that states will return to the drawing board to make their systems better before too much time passes. There are now great models to look to, especially (in our view) those proposed by Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, and Washington. Congress probably won’t get around to reauthorizing the law for a decade or more. States need not—and should not—wait that long to make improvements.

But that is a conversation for another day. For now, let’s celebrate the fact that states, by and large, seized the ESSA opportunity to make their school accountability systems clearer and fairer. In this era of political dysfunction, that’s no small thing.

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# ALABAMA



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Alabama's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 26, 2017,<sup>26</sup> as explained below.

## 1 Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Alabama's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use an A–F grading system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

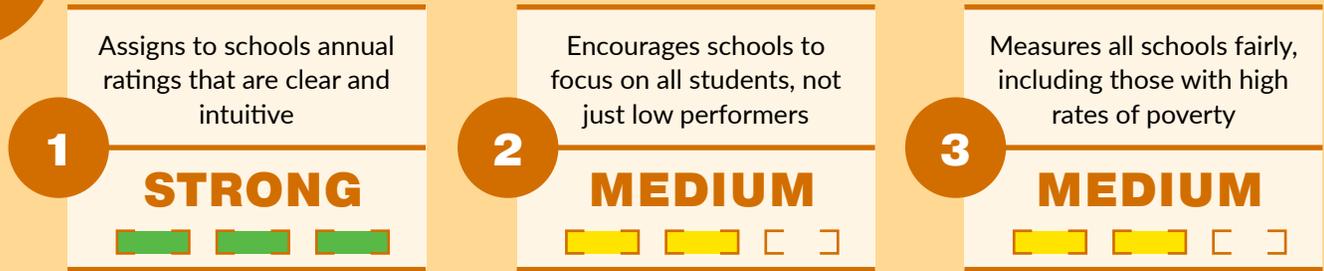
## 2 Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index and/or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Alabama receives a **medium** because—despite measuring achievement with proficiency rates, which might encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—student-level growth for all students constitutes 40 percent of schools' annual ratings, which should at least partially encourage schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

## 3 Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Alabama gets a **medium** here because student-level growth will constitute 40 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# ALASKA



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Alaska’s proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>27</sup> as explained below.

## 1 Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Alaska’s plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use a one-hundred-point system for schools’ annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

## 2 Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index and/or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Alaska receives a **medium** because—despite measuring achievement with proficiency rates, which might encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—student-level growth for all students constitutes 40 percent of schools’ annual ratings, which should at least partially encourage schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

## 3 Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Alaska gets a **medium** here because student-level growth will constitute 40 percent of schools’ annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# ARIZONA



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Arizona's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 9, 2017,<sup>28</sup> as explained below.

## 1 Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Arizona's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use an A–F grading system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

## 2 Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Arizona receives a **strong** because those two components constitute 55 percent of schools' annual ratings. A performance index counts for 30 percent, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 25 percent of schools' summative ratings, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

## 3 Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Arizona is **strong** here because academic growth will constitute 50 percent of schools' annual ratings—split evenly between growth for all students and growth to proficiency. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty, allowing high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# ARKANSAS

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

1

**STRONG**



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

2

**STRONG**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

3

**STRONG**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Arkansas's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>29</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Arkansas's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use a one-hundred-point system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

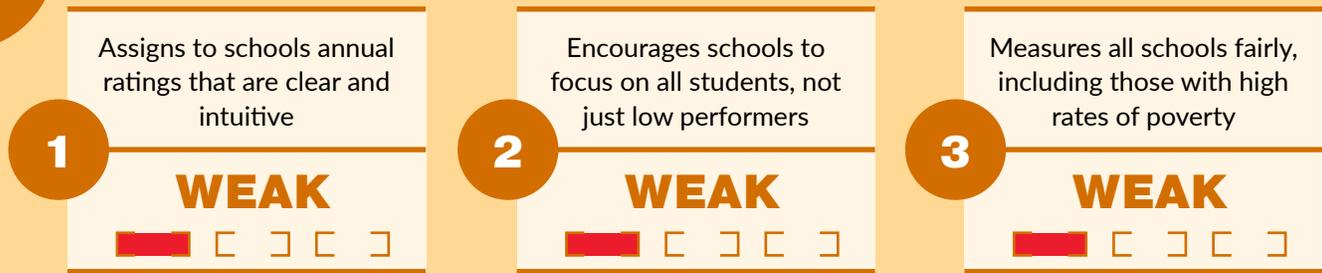
There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Arkansas receives a **strong** rating because those two components constitute 85 percent of schools' annual ratings. A performance index counts for 35 percent, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 50 percent of schools' summative ratings, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Arkansas is **strong** here because academic growth will constitute 50 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# CALIFORNIA



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether California's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>30</sup> as explained below.

## 1 Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

California receives a grade of **weak** because, aside from identifying very-low-performing schools in need of support, it proposes a “dashboard” approach that comprises myriad data points and no bottom line. This is a mistake because such systems do not immediately convey to all observers how well most schools are performing.

## 2 Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index and/or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. California receives a grade of **weak** because it measures achievement with proficiency rates, which may encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—and because a measure of growth for all students constitutes just 20 percent of the state's accountability system, which is apt to lead schools to disregard the educational needs of higher-achieving children, especially those in high-poverty schools.

## 3 Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

California is **weak** here because it assigns academic growth a weight of just 20 percent. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings. California's approach unfairly disadvantages high-poverty schools.

# COLORADO

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

1

**STRONG**



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

2

**STRONG**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

3

**STRONG**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Colorado's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 9, 2017,<sup>31</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Colorado's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use a one-hundred-point system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing in relation to the state's other schools.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Colorado receives a **strong** rating because those two components constitute 95 percent of schools' annual ratings. Average scale scores count for 35 percent, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 60 percent of schools' summative ratings, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Colorado is **strong** here because academic growth will constitute 60 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# CONNECTICUT

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

**STRONG**



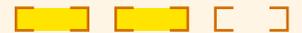
2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

**STRONG**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

**MEDIUM**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Connecticut's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on April 21, 2017,<sup>32</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Connecticut's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use a one-hundred-point scale for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

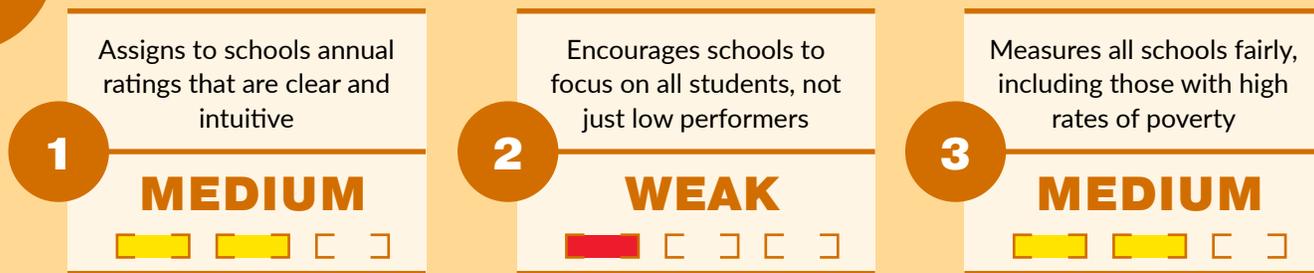
There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Connecticut receives a **strong** rating because those two components constitute 82 percent of schools' annual ratings. A performance index counts for 35 percent, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 47 percent of schools' summative ratings, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Connecticut earns a **medium** here because academic growth will constitute 47 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# DELAWARE



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Delaware's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on April 3, 2017,<sup>33</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Delaware's plan earns a **medium** on this point because it proposes to use text labels as schools' annual ratings. Although the proposed labels are easy to understand, in isolation each one fails to communicate how much better or worse a given school could do (it's not instantly clear to a parent, for example, whether "exceeds expectations" is Delaware's best possible rating). This model fails to convey immediately to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Delaware receives a **weak** because it measures achievement with proficiency rates, which may encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—and because a measure of growth for all students constitutes less than 33 percent of schools' annual ratings, which is apt to lead schools to disregard the educational needs of higher-achieving children, especially those in high-poverty schools.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Delaware earns a **medium** here because academic growth of any kind will constitute 35 percent of schools' annual ratings—comprising overall growth for all students in math and English language arts, growth to proficiency, and growth of the lowest- and highest-achieving student quartiles. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether the District of Columbia's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 2, 2017,<sup>34</sup> as explained below.

## 1 Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

D.C. is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use a five-star system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

## 2 Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. The District of Columbia receives a **strong** because those two components constitute 50 percent of schools' annual ratings. A performance index counts for 30 percent, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 20 percent of schools' summative ratings, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

## 3 Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

D.C. earns a **medium** here because academic growth will constitute 40 percent of schools' annual ratings—split evenly between growth for all students and growth to proficiency. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# FLORIDA

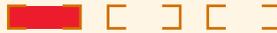
1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

**STRONG**



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

**WEAK**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

**STRONG**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Florida's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 20, 2017,<sup>35</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Florida's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use an A–F grading system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index and/or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Florida receives a grade of **weak** because it measures achievement with proficiency rates, which may encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—and because a measure of growth for all students constitutes just 28.5 percent of schools' annual ratings, which is apt to lead schools to disregard the educational needs of higher-achieving children, especially those in high-poverty schools. Florida is one of just thirteen states to receive a “weak” on this indicator.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Florida is **strong** here because academic growth will constitute 57 percent of schools' annual ratings—split evenly between growth for all students and growth for the lowest-achieving 25 percent of students. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# GEORGIA

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

**STRONG**



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

**STRONG**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

**STRONG**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Georgia's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>36</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Georgia's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use a one-hundred-point system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

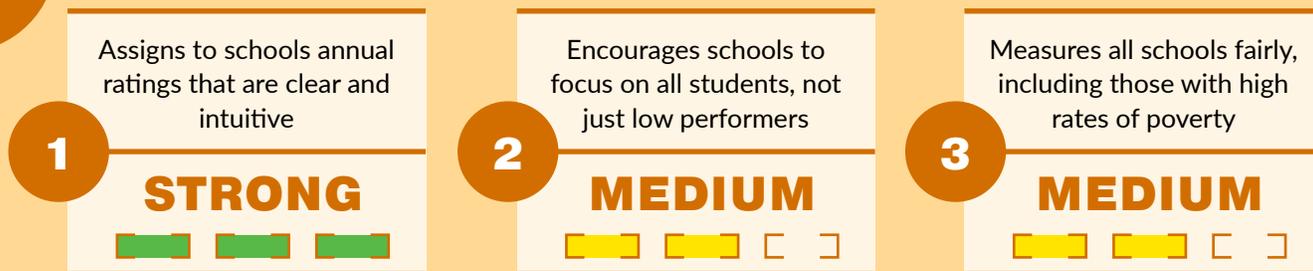
There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Georgia receives a **strong** rating because those two components constitute 65 percent of schools' annual ratings. A performance index counts for 30 percent, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 35 percent of schools' summative ratings, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Georgia earns a **strong** here because academic growth will constitute 50 percent of schools' annual ratings—35 percent growth for all students and 15 percent devoted to growth in closing achievement gaps. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# HAWAII



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Hawaii's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 21, 2017,<sup>37</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Hawaii's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use a one-hundred-point system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

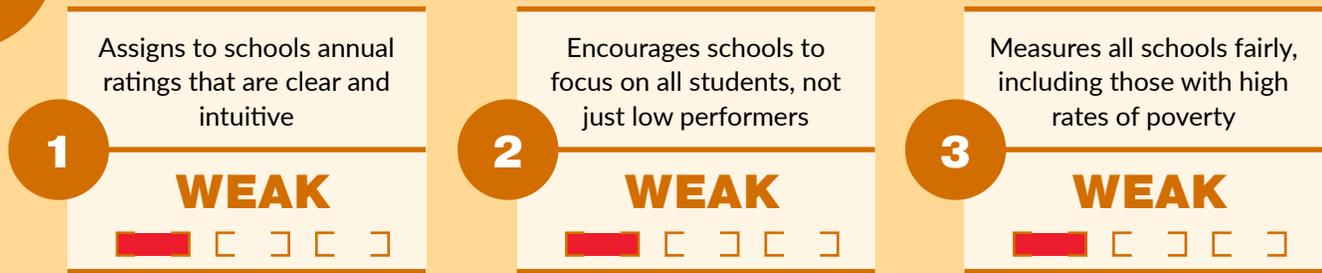
There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index and/or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Hawaii receives a **medium** because—despite measuring achievement with proficiency rates, which might encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—student-level growth for all students constitutes 40 percent of schools' annual ratings, which should at least partially encourage schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Hawaii gets a **medium** here because student-level growth will constitute 40 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# IDAHO



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Idaho's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>38</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Idaho receives a grade of **weak** because, aside from identifying very-low-performing schools in need of support, it proposes a “dashboard” approach that consists of myriad data points and no bottom line. This is a mistake because such systems do not immediately convey to all observers how well most schools are performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index and/or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Idaho receives a grade of **weak** because it measures achievement with proficiency rates and only measures students' growth to proficiency, which may encourage schools to focus exclusively on pupils near the proficiency cutoff.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Idaho gets a **weak** here because it assigns academic growth a weight of just 30 percent. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings. Idaho's approach unfairly disadvantages high-poverty schools.

# ILLINOIS

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

1

**STRONG**



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

2

**STRONG**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

3

**STRONG**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Illinois's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 2, 2017,<sup>39</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Illinois's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use a four-tier system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Illinois receives a **strong** because—despite measuring achievement with proficiency rates, which might encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—a measure of growth for all students constitutes 50 percent of schools' summative ratings, which should lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Illinois is **strong** here because academic growth will constitute 50 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# INDIANA

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

**STRONG**



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

**MEDIUM**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

**MEDIUM**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Indiana's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>40</sup> as explained below.

## 1 Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Indiana's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use an A–F grading system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

## 2 Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index and/or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Indiana receives a **medium** because—despite measuring achievement with proficiency rates, which might encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—student-level growth for all students constitutes 42.5 percent of schools' annual ratings, which should at least partially encourage schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

## 3 Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Indiana is **medium** here because student-level growth will constitute 42.5 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# Iowa

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

**STRONG**



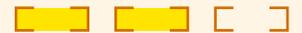
2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

**STRONG**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

**MEDIUM**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Iowa's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>41</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Iowa's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use an index score. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

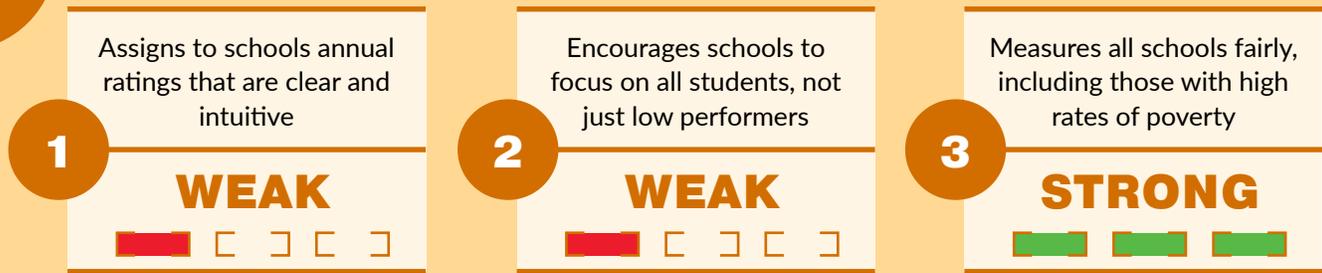
There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Iowa receives a **strong** rating because those two components constitute 55.7 percent of schools' annual ratings.<sup>42</sup> Scale scores count for 12.7 percent, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 43 percent of schools' summative ratings, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Iowa gets a **medium** here because student-level growth will constitute 43 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# KANSAS



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Kansas's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>43</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Kansas receives a grade of **weak** because it proposes to use text labels that aren't clear regarding most schools' quality. The vast majority of schools will receive the "eligible for universal support and improvement" label, which conveys almost nothing about how well they're performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index and/or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Kansas receives a grade of **weak** because it measures achievement with proficiency rates—which may encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—and only measures the progress of students in disadvantaged subgroups.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Kansas is **strong** here because academic growth will constitute 60 percent of schools' annual ratings—all of which is a gap closing measure that tracks the progress of students in disadvantaged subgroups. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# KENTUCKY

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

**STRONG**



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

**STRONG**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

**MEDIUM**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Kentucky's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>44</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Kentucky's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use a five-star system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Kentucky receives a **strong** rating because those two components constitute 65 percent of schools' annual ratings.<sup>45</sup> Performance indexes count for 40 percent, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 25 percent of schools' summative ratings, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Kentucky is **medium** here because student-level growth will constitute 45 percent of schools' annual ratings—25 percent growth for all students and 20 percent for a gap-closing measure that tracks the progress of students in disadvantaged subgroups. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# LOUISIANA



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Louisiana's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 3, 2017,<sup>46</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Louisiana's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use an A–F grading system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Louisiana receives a **strong** because those two components constitute 95 percent of schools' annual ratings. A performance index counts for 70 percent, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 25 percent of schools' summative ratings, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Louisiana is **weak** here because academic growth will constitute just 25 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# MAINE

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

**MEDIUM**



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

**MEDIUM**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

**MEDIUM**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Maine's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 4, 2017,<sup>47</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Maine's plan earns a **medium** on this point because it proposes to use text labels for schools' annual ratings. Although the proposed labels are easy to understand, in isolation each label fails to communicate how much better or worse a given school could do (it's not instantly clear, for example, whether "below expectations" is the worst possible rating; in Maine, it's second worst after "requires review for support"). Thus this model fails to convey immediately to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

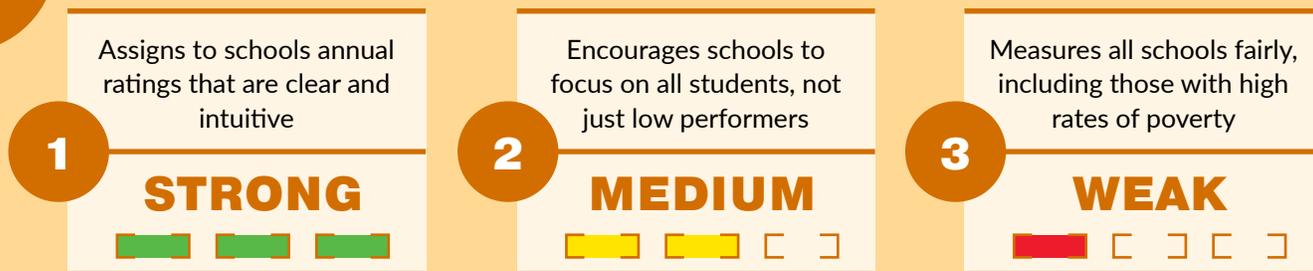
There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Maine receives a **medium** because—despite measuring achievement proficiency rates, which might encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—a measure of growth for all students constitutes 38 percent of schools' annual ratings, which should at least partially encourage schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Maine gets a **medium** here because student-level growth will constitute 38 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# MARYLAND



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Maryland's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>48</sup> as explained below.

## 1 Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Maryland's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use a five-star system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

## 2 Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Maryland receives a **medium** rating because, despite including those two components, they only constitute 35 percent of schools' annual ratings. A performance index, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency, counts for just 10 percent. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 25 percent of schools' annual ratings, which should at least partially encourage schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

## 3 Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Maryland is **weak** here because academic growth will constitute just 25 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# MASSACHUSETTS



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Massachusetts's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 10, 2017,<sup>49</sup> as explained below.

## 1 Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Massachusetts's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use a six-tier system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

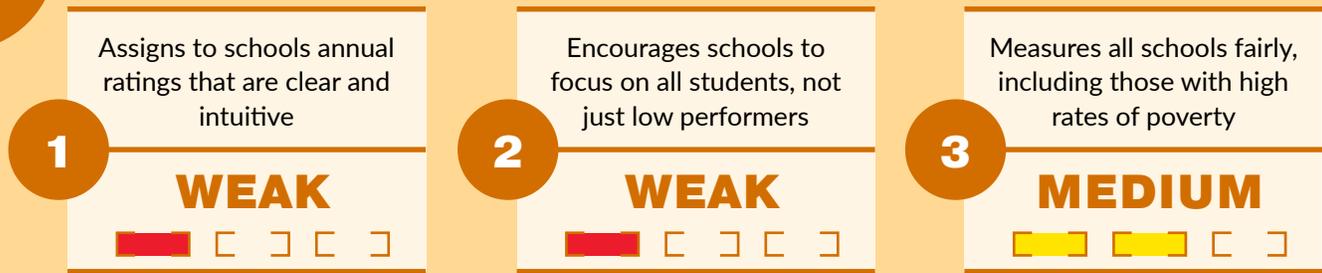
## 2 Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Massachusetts receives a **strong** because those two components constitute 85 percent of schools' annual ratings. Average scale scores count for 60 percent, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 25 percent of schools' summative ratings, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

## 3 Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Massachusetts is **weak** here because academic growth will constitute just 25 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings. Massachusetts's approach will unfairly disadvantage high-poverty schools.

# MICHIGAN



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Michigan's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 6, 2017,<sup>50</sup> as explained below.

## 1 Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Michigan receives a grade of **weak** because, aside from identifying very-low-performing schools in need of support, it proposes a “dashboard” approach that comprises myriad data points and no bottom line. This is a mistake because such systems do not immediately convey to all observers how well most schools are performing.

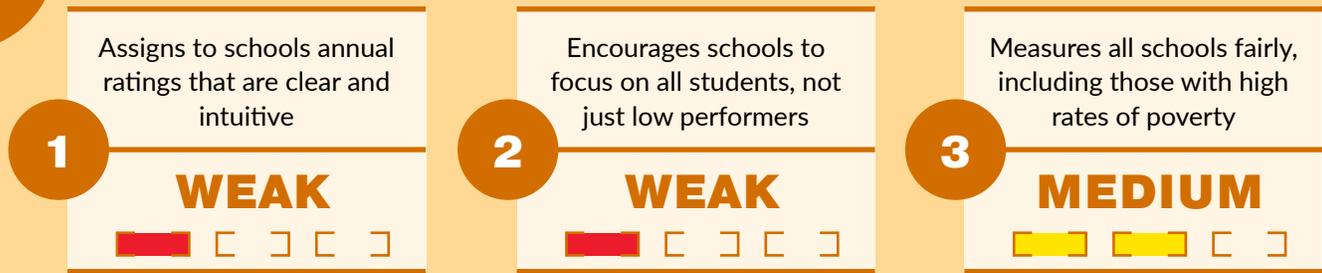
## 2 Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index and/or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Michigan receives a grade of **weak** because it measures achievement with proficiency rates and only measures students' growth to proficiency, which may encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff.

## 3 Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Michigan is **medium** here because it assigns academic growth a weight of 38.2 percent—all of which is a measure of growth to proficiency. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# MINNESOTA



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Minnesota’s proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>51</sup> as explained below.

## 1 Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Minnesota receives a grade of **weak** because it proposes to use text labels that aren’t clear regarding most schools’ quality. It only identifies whether schools need support—and therefore fails to differentiate among the many schools that aren’t identified.

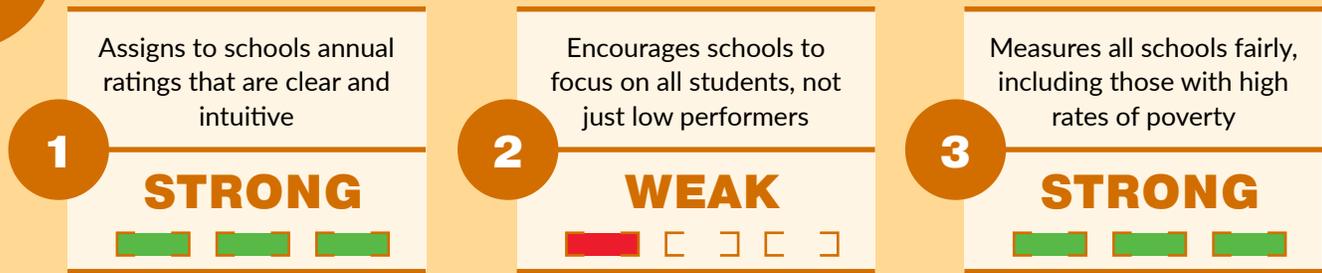
## 2 Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index and/or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Minnesota receives a grade of **weak** because it measures achievement with proficiency rates and only measures students’ growth to proficiency—which may encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff.

## 3 Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Minnesota is **medium** here because it assigns academic growth a weight of 40 percent—all of which is a measure of growth to proficiency.<sup>52</sup> Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# MISSISSIPPI



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Mississippi's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>53</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Mississippi's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use an A–F grading system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index and/or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Mississippi receives a grade of **weak** because it measures achievement with proficiency rates, which may encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—and because a measure of growth for all students constitutes just 28.5 percent of schools' annual ratings, which is apt to lead schools to disregard the educational needs of higher-achieving children, especially those in high-poverty schools.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Mississippi is **strong** here because academic growth will constitute 57 percent of schools' annual ratings—split evenly between growth for all students and growth for the lowest-achieving 25 percent of students. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# MISSOURI

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

1

**STRONG**



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

2

**STRONG**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

3

**MEDIUM**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Missouri's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>54</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Missouri's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use an index score. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

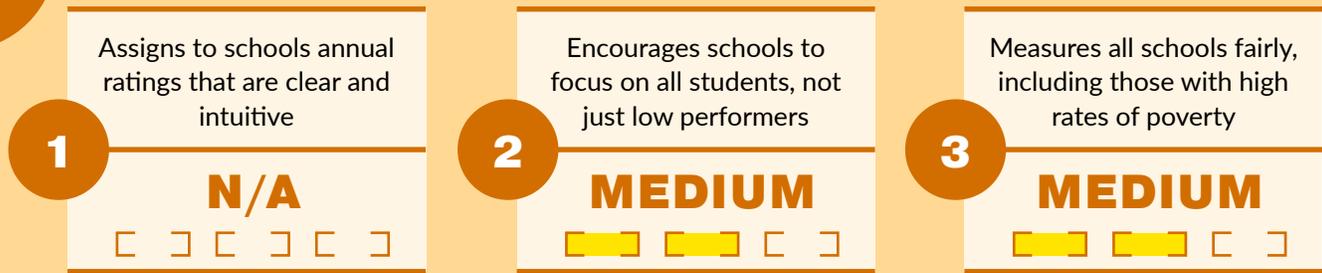
There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Missouri receives a **strong** rating because those two components constitute 87.5 percent of schools' annual ratings. A performance index counts for 50 percent, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 37.5 percent of schools' summative ratings, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Missouri gets a **medium** here because student-level growth for all students will constitute 37.5 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# MONTANA



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Montana’s proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 14, 2017,<sup>55</sup> as explained below.

## 1 Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Montana receives a mark of **not applicable** because it is still deciding between text-based summative annual ratings and those that are similar to A–F, five-star, and numeric ratings. We encourage policymakers to adopt ratings that fall into the latter group to ensure that they’re clear and intuitive for educators, parents, and the general public.

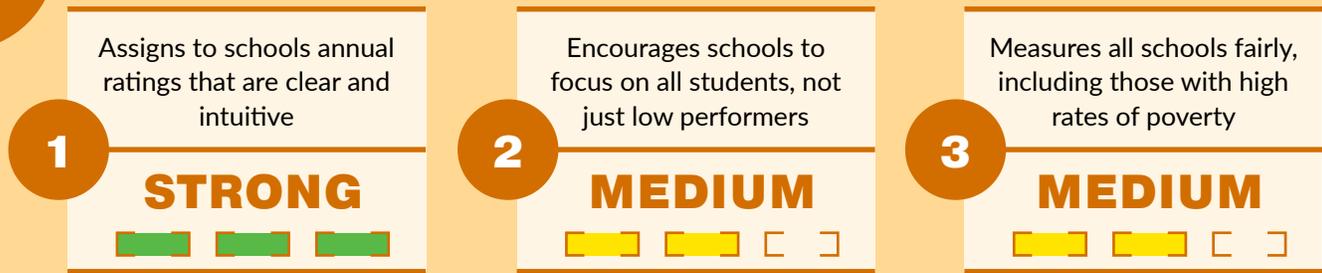
## 2 Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index and/or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Montana receives a **medium** because—despite measuring achievement with proficiency rates, which might encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—student-level growth for all students constitutes 33 percent of schools’ annual ratings, which should at least partially encourage schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

## 3 Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Montana gets a **medium** here because student-level growth will constitute 33 percent of schools’ annual ratings.<sup>56</sup> Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# NEBRASKA



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Nebraska's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 22, 2017,<sup>57</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Nebraska's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use a four-tier system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Nebraska doesn't assign specific weights to its indicators, but it earns a **medium** here because scale scores are the foundation of its system and it uses a measure of growth for all students. The state should more clearly signal to schools how important these two factors are. But the current framework will help encourage schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency and heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Nebraska doesn't assign specific weights to its indicator, but it still earns a **medium** rating because its use of three growth measures—school-level growth, student-level growth, and the progress of non-proficient students—communicates to schools that academic growth is a priority. This is important because growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# NEVADA

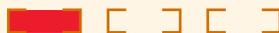
1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

**STRONG**



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

**WEAK**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

**MEDIUM**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Nevada's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on April 12, 2017,<sup>58</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Nevada's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use a five-star system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Nevada receives a **weak** because it measures achievement with proficiency rates, which may encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—and because a measure of growth for all students constitutes just 17.5 percent of schools' annual ratings, which is apt to lead schools to disregard the educational needs of higher-achieving children, especially those in high-poverty schools.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Nevada is **medium** here because academic growth will constitute 35 percent of schools' annual ratings—split evenly between growth for all students and growth to proficiency. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# NEW HAMPSHIRE

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

**STRONG**



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

**STRONG**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

**STRONG**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether New Hampshire's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 24, 2017,<sup>59</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

New Hampshire's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use a four-tier system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. New Hampshire receives a **strong** rating because those two components constitute 70 percent of schools' annual ratings. A performance index counts for 40 percent, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 30 percent of the state's accountability system, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

New Hampshire is **strong** here because it assigns academic growth a weight of 60 percent—split evenly between growth for all students and growth for the lowest-achieving 25 percent of students. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# NEW JERSEY

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

1

**MEDIUM**



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

2

**MEDIUM**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

3

**MEDIUM**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether New Jersey's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 3, 2017,<sup>60</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

New Jersey's plan earns a **medium** on this point because it proposes to use text labels for schools' annual ratings. Although the proposed labels are easy to understand, in isolation each label fails to communicate how much better or worse a given school could do (it's not instantly clear, for example, how good or bad "meets target" is; in New Jersey it's the middle of three labels, the others being "exceeds target" and "below target"). This model fails to convey immediately to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

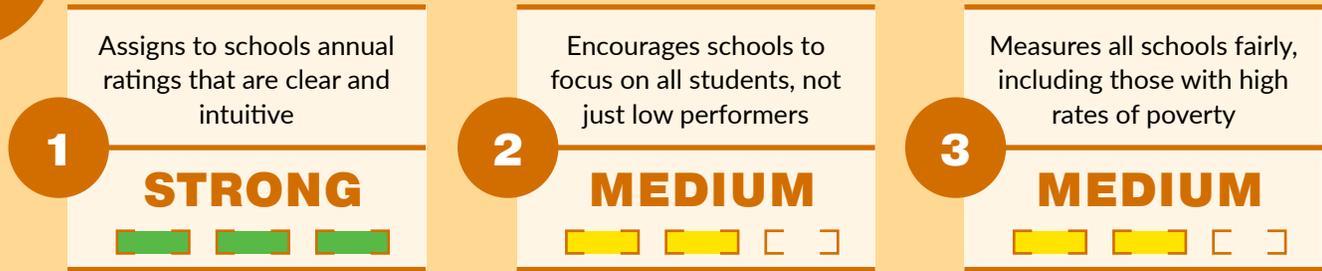
There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. New Jersey receives a **medium** because—despite measuring achievement with proficiency rates, which might encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—a measure of growth for all students constitutes 40 percent of schools' annual ratings, which should at least partially encourage schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

New Jersey is **medium** here because academic growth will constitute 40 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# NEW MEXICO



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether New Mexico's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on April 11, 2017,<sup>61</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

New Mexico's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use a one-hundred-point system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. New Mexico receives a **medium** because—despite measuring achievement proficiency rates, which might encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—student-level growth for all students constitutes 42 percent of schools' annual ratings, which should at least partially encourage schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

New Mexico is **medium** here because student-level growth for all students will constitute 42 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# NEW YORK



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether New York’s proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>62</sup> as explained below.

## 1 Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

New York’s plan earns a **medium** on this point because it proposes to use text labels as schools’ annual ratings. Although the proposed labels are easy to understand, in isolation each one fails to communicate how much better or worse a given school could do (it’s not instantly clear to a parent, for example, whether “recognition school” is New York’s best possible rating). Thus this model fails to convey immediately to all observers how well a given school is performing.

## 2 Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. New York receives a **strong** rating here because it will laudably use a performance indexes and a measure of growth for all students, and it assigns these two metrics the greatest weight among its indicators. This will help encourage schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency and heed the educational needs of every child.

## 3 Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

New York will measure the growth for all students, but it receives a mark of **not applicable** here because it does not provide enough detail in its plan to determine what role this metric plays in its system. We are therefore unable to evaluate the system using our methodology.

# NORTH CAROLINA



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether North Carolina's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>63</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

North Carolina's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use an A–F grading system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index and/or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. North Carolina receives a grade of **weak** because it measures achievement with proficiency rates, which may encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—and because a measure of growth for all students constitutes just 20 percent of schools' annual ratings, which is apt to lead schools to disregard the educational needs of higher-achieving children, especially those in high-poverty schools.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

North Carolina gets a **weak** here because academic growth will constitute just 20 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# NORTH DAKOTA

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether North Dakota’s proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 5, 2017,<sup>64</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

North Dakota receives a grade of **weak** because, aside from identifying very-low-performing schools in need of support, it proposes a “dashboard” approach that consists of myriad data points and no bottom line. This is a mistake because such systems do not immediately convey to all observers how well most schools are performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. North Dakota receives a grade of **weak** because it measures achievement with proficiency rates, which may encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—and because a measure of growth for all students constitutes just 30 percent of the state’s accountability system, which is apt to lead schools to disregard the educational needs of higher-achieving children, especially those in high-poverty schools.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

North Dakota is **weak** here because it assigns academic growth a weight of just 30 percent. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings. North Dakota’s approach will unfairly disadvantage high-poverty schools.

# OHIO

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

**STRONG**



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

**MEDIUM**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

**STRONG**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Ohio's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>65</sup> as explained below.

## 1 Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Ohio's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use an A–F grading system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

## 2 Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Ohio receives a **medium** rating because, despite including those two components, they only constitute 36 percent of schools' annual ratings. A performance index, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency, counts for just 21 percent. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 15 percent of schools' annual ratings, which should at least partially encourage schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

## 3 Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Ohio gets a **strong** here because academic growth will constitute 50 percent of schools' annual ratings—comprising a mix of growth for all students, gifted growth, growth of students with disabilities, growth of low-achieving students, and progress in K–3 literacy. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—allowing high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# OKLAHOMA

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

1

**STRONG**



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

2

**STRONG**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

3

**STRONG**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Oklahoma's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>66</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Oklahoma's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use an A–F grading system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

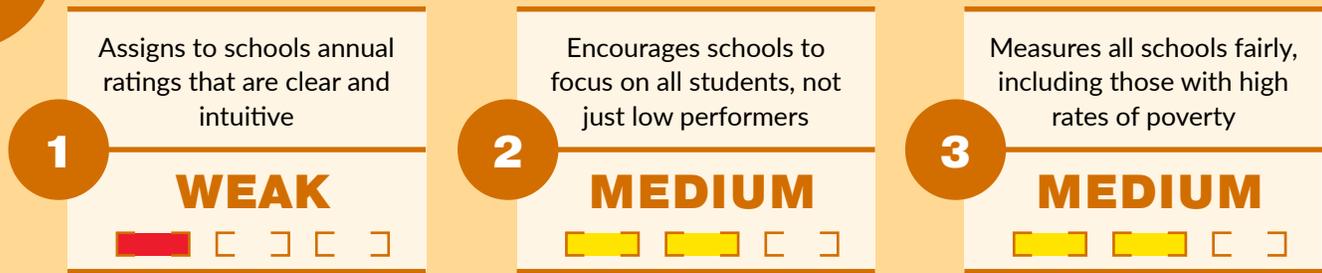
There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Oklahoma receives a **strong** rating because those two components constitute 72 percent of schools' annual ratings. Scale scores count for 39 percent, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 33 percent of schools' summative ratings, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Oklahoma gets a **strong** here because academic growth will constitute 72 percent of schools' annual ratings—39 percent for a measure that tracks the progress of student groups and 33 percent for a measure of growth for all children.<sup>67</sup> Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—allowing high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# OREGON



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Oregon's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 3, 2017,<sup>68</sup> as explained below.

## 1 Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Oregon's plan is **weak** on this point because will only assign annual labels to very-low-performing schools that are in need of support, forgoing labels entirely for all other schools. This is a mistake. For more than two decades, school ratings have been at the heart of state accountability systems—and for good reason. Easy-to-understand labels, such as A–F letter grades, provide clear signals to parents, citizens, and educators about the quality of a school and can nudge systems toward improvement.

## 2 Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Oregon receives a **medium** because—despite measuring achievement with proficiency rates, which might encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—a measure of growth for all students constitutes 44 percent of the state's accountability system, which should at least partially encourage schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

## 3 Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Oregon is **medium** here because it assigns academic growth a weight of 44 percent. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# PENNSYLVANIA



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Pennsylvania's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>69</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Pennsylvania receives a grade of **weak** because it proposes to use text labels that aren't clear regarding most schools' quality. It only identifies whether schools need support—and therefore fails to differentiate among the many schools that aren't identified.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index and/or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Pennsylvania receives a **strong** because—despite measuring achievement with proficiency rates, which might encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—a measure of growth for all students constitutes 50 percent of the state's accountability system, which should lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.<sup>70</sup>

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Pennsylvania is **strong** here because it assigns academic growth a weight of 50 percent.<sup>71</sup> Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# RHODE ISLAND

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

1

**STRONG**



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

2

**STRONG**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

3

**MEDIUM**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Rhode Island's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>72</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Rhode Island's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use an A–F grading system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Rhode Island receives a **strong** rating because those two components constitute 66 percent of schools' annual ratings. A performance index counts for 33 percent, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 33 percent of schools' summative ratings, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Rhode Island gets a **medium** here because student-level growth for all students will constitute 33 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# SOUTH CAROLINA

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

1

**STRONG**



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

2

**STRONG**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

3

**MEDIUM**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether South Carolina's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on October 13, 2017,<sup>73</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

South Carolina's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to annually rate schools with a system that combines a one-hundred-point scale with text labels that are easy to understand. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. South Carolina receives a **strong** rating because those two components constitute 60 percent of schools' annual ratings. Performance indexes count for 40 percent, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 20 percent of schools' summative ratings, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

South Carolina earns a **medium** here because academic growth will constitute 40 percent of schools' annual ratings—split evenly between a measure of growth for all students and a measure of students scoring in the bottom quartile of achievement. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# SOUTH DAKOTA

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

**STRONG**



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

**STRONG**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

**MEDIUM**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether South Dakota's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>74</sup> as explained below.

## 1 Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

South Dakota's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use a one-hundred-point system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

## 2 Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. South Dakota receives a **strong** rating because those two components constitute 80 percent of schools' annual ratings. A performance index counts for 40 percent, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 40 percent of schools' summative ratings, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

## 3 Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

South Dakota earns a **medium** here because academic growth will constitute 40 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# TENNESSEE

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

**STRONG**



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

**MEDIUM**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

**STRONG**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Tennessee's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 3, 2017,<sup>25</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Tennessee's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use an A–F grading system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

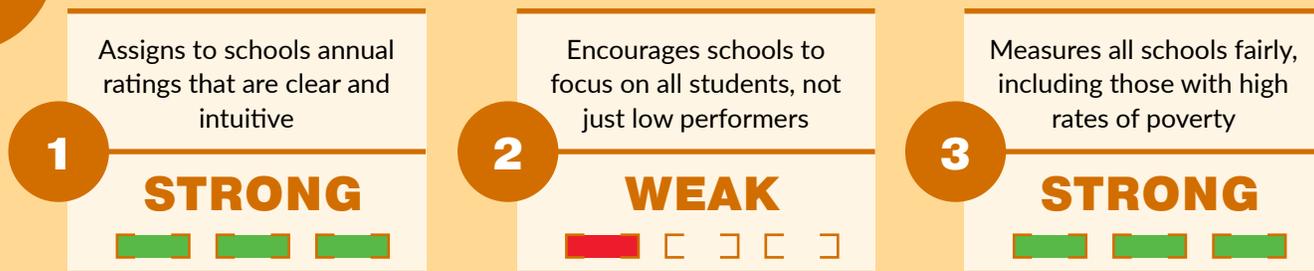
There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Tennessee receives a **medium** because—despite measuring achievement with proficiency rates, which might encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—a measure of growth for all students constitutes 35 percent of schools' annual ratings, which should at least partially encourage schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Tennessee is **strong** here because academic growth will constitute 80 percent of schools' annual ratings—35 percent growth for all students and 45 percent growth to proficiency. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty, thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# TEXAS



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Texas's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 25, 2017,<sup>76</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Texas's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use an A–F grading system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index and/or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Texas receives a grade of **weak** because it measures achievement with proficiency rates, which may encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—and because a measure of growth for all students can count for 0 percent of a schools' annual rating, depending on its proficiency rate.<sup>77</sup> This is apt to lead certain schools to disregard the educational needs of higher-achieving children.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Texas is **strong** here because academic growth can count for as much as 70 percent of high poverty schools' annual ratings.<sup>78</sup> Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# UTAH

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

**STRONG**



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

**MEDIUM**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

**STRONG**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Utah's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>79</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Utah's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use an A–F grading system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

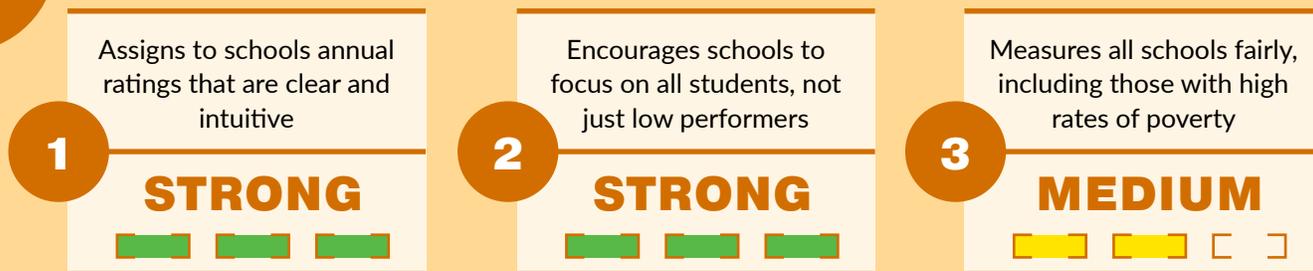
There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index and/or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Utah receives a **medium** because—despite measuring achievement with proficiency rates, which might encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—student-level growth for all students constitutes 37 percent of schools' annual ratings, which should at least partially encourage schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Utah is **strong** here because academic growth will constitute 54 percent of schools' annual ratings—37 percent growth for all and 17 percent growth to for the lowest-achieving 25 percent of students. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty, allowing high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# VERMONT



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Vermont's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 3, 2017,<sup>80</sup> as explained below.

## 1 Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Vermont's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to annually rate schools with a system comprising four numerical levels, accompanied by clear text labels. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

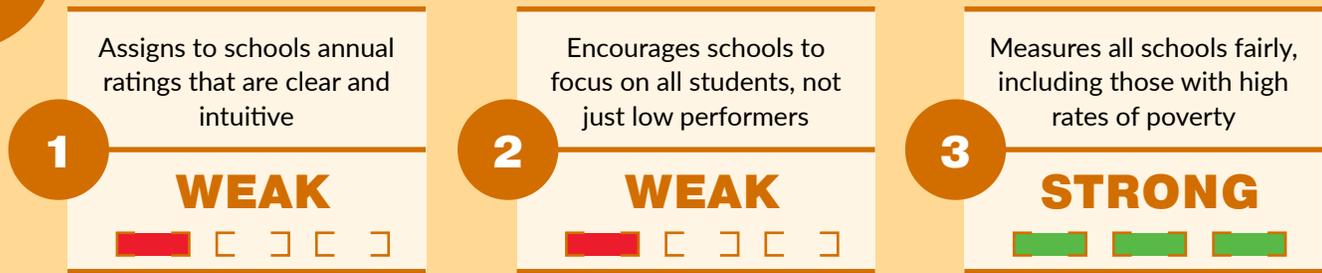
## 2 Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Vermont receives a grade of **strong** because those two components constitute 80 percent of schools' annual ratings. A performance index counts for half of that, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes the other half of schools' summative ratings, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.<sup>81</sup>

## 3 Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Vermont is **medium** here because academic growth will constitute 40 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# VIRGINIA



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Virginia's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 21, 2017,<sup>82</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Virginia receives a grade of **weak** because it proposes to use text labels that aren't clear regarding most schools' quality. The vast majority of schools will receive the "accredited" label, which conveys almost nothing about how well they're performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index and/or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Virginia receives a grade of **weak** because it measures achievement with proficiency rates and only measures students' growth to proficiency—which may encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Virginia is **strong** here because it assigns academic growth a weight of 50 percent. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# WASHINGTON

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

1

**STRONG**



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

2

**STRONG**



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

3

**STRONG**



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Washington's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>83</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Washington's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use an index system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index and/or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Washington receives a **strong** because—despite measuring achievement with proficiency rates, which might encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—a measure of growth for all students constitutes 55 percent of schools' summative ratings, which should lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Washington is **strong** here because academic growth will constitute 55 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# WEST VIRGINIA



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether West Virginia’s proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 21, 2017,<sup>84</sup> as explained below.

## 1 Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

West Virginia’s plan earns a **medium** on this point because it proposes to use text labels as schools’ annual ratings. Although the proposed labels are easy to understand, in isolation each one fails to communicate how much better or worse a given school could do (it’s not instantly clear to a parent, for example, whether “distinguished” is West Virginia’s best possible rating). This model fails to convey immediately to all observers how well a given school is performing.

## 2 Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. West Virginia receives a **strong** rating because those two components constitute 56 percent of schools’ annual ratings. A performance index counts for 28 percent, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 28 percent of schools’ summative ratings, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

## 3 Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

West Virginia gets a **weak** here because academic growth will constitute just 28 percent of schools’ annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings. West Virginia’s approach will unfairly disadvantage high-poverty schools.

# WISCONSIN



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Wisconsin's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017,<sup>85</sup> as explained below.

## 1 Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Wisconsin's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use a one-hundred-point system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

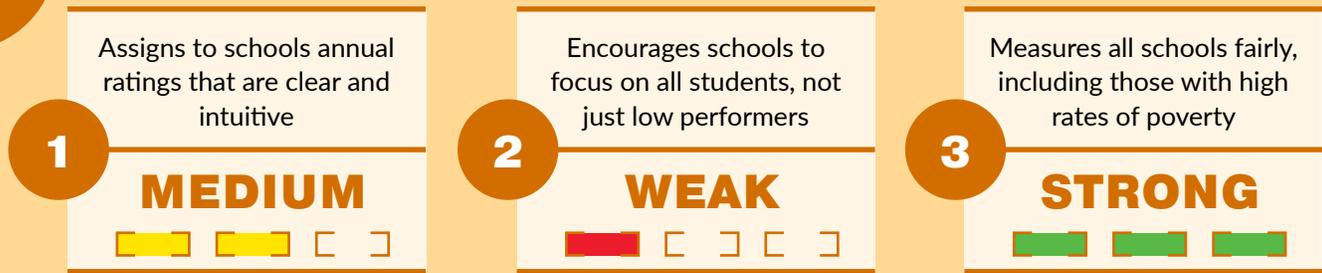
## 2 Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Wisconsin receives a **strong** rating because those two components constitute 85 percent of schools' annual ratings. A performance index counts for 42.5 percent, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 42.5 percent of schools' summative ratings, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

## 3 Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Wisconsin earns a **medium** here because academic growth will constitute 42.5 percent of schools' annual ratings. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# WYOMING



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether Wyoming's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 21, 2017,<sup>86</sup> as explained below.

1

## Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

Wyoming's plan earns a **medium** on this point because it proposes to use text labels as schools' annual ratings. Although the proposed labels are easy to understand, in isolation each one fails to communicate how much better or worse a given school could do (it's not instantly clear to a parent, for example, whether "exceeds expectations" is Wyoming's best possible rating). This model fails to convey immediately to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2

## Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index and/or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Wyoming receives a grade of **weak** because it measures achievement with proficiency rates, which may encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—and because a measure of growth for all students constitutes just 25 percent of schools' annual ratings, which is apt to lead schools to disregard the educational needs of higher-achieving children, especially those in high-poverty schools.

3

## Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

Wyoming is **strong** here because academic growth will constitute 50 percent of schools' annual ratings—split evenly between growth for all students and growth for the lowest-achieving 25 percent of students. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.

# GLOSSARY

## **Average scale score:**

The average score of all students within a school on a state-administered test used for accountability purposes and/or the average scores of student subgroups, such as economically disadvantaged students, African American students, Hispanic students, students with disabilities, and more.<sup>87</sup>

## **Growth for all:**

A measure of the academic progress of all students, regardless of their achievement level, based on the results of a state-administered test used for accountability purposes.<sup>88</sup> There are many ways states do this. Here are four common models, and brief explanations of how they work:<sup>89</sup>

- **Categorical model:** compares the performance categories that students fall into from one year to the next
- **Multivariate value-added model:** estimates a school's contribution to students' academic growth by comparing their actual growth to their expected growth based on prior achievement and other factors
- **Student growth percentile model:** compares students to peers with similar achievement in the previous school year by ranking them based on their year-to-year growth
- **Vertical scale growth model:** tracks student growth within the same subject across grades, despite differences in test content and difficulty

Note, however, that these models only count as measures of growth for all students if states apply them to all students, which isn't always the case. For example, a state might use its model to gauge the progress of a subset set of students, such as low achievers or high achievers.

## **Growth to standard:**

A measure of students' academic progress toward one or more absolute achievement standards, such as "proficient," based on the results of a state-administered test used for accountability purposes. Some growth to standard measures qualify as "growth for all" measures, insofar as they set appropriate goals for students regardless of their achievement level. Alternatively, growth to standard measures can apply to only a subset of students. For example, a "growth to proficiency" measure tracks the growth of students toward proficiency, effectively excluding those who are already achieving at a proficient level.

# ENDNOTES

1. See, for example, C. Phenicie, “74 Interview: Senator Lamar Alexander on Keeping ESSA From Becoming The Next Obamacare,” *The 74*, July 10, 2016, <https://www.the74million.org/article/the-74-interview-lamar-alexander-on-keeping-essa-from-becoming-the-next-obamacare>.
2. Two states earns marks of not applicable. Montana received one for its annual school labels because its deciding between summative ratings that are text based, which would likely earn it a medium grade, and those that are similar to A–F, five-star, and numeric ratings, which would earn it a strong grade. And New York received one for its fairness to high poverty schools because it does not provide enough detail in its plan to determine the importance of growth in its system.
3. R. Hess, “Of ESSA Plans and TPS Reports,” *Education Week*, May 31, 2017, [blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rick\\_hess\\_straight\\_up/2017/05/of\\_essa\\_plans\\_and\\_tps\\_reports.html](https://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rick_hess_straight_up/2017/05/of_essa_plans_and_tps_reports.html).
4. E. Hanushek and M. Raymond, *Does School Accountability Lead to Improved Student Performance?* (Washington, D.C.: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2004), <http://hanushek.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/hanushek+raymond.2005jpam24-2.pdf>; M. Carnoy and S. Loeb, “Does External Accountability Affect Student Outcomes? A Cross-State Analysis,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 24, no. 4 (2002), <https://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/EEPAaccountability.pdf>.
5. ESSA requires states to annually identify their lowest performing schools, which are then subject to intervention. There is no explicit mandate, however, for states to assign ratings to schools beyond those identified for intervention and those not. States that publish A–F grades and the like are choosing to do so voluntarily.
6. J. Booher-Jennings, *Below the Bubble: ‘Educational Triage’ and the Texas Accountability System* (New York, NY: Columbia University, 2005), <http://aer.sagepub.com/content/42/2/231.short>; D. Ballou and M. Springer, *Achievement Trade-Offs and No Child Left Behind* (Nashville, TN: Peabody College of Vanderbilt University, 2008), [http://www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice/documents/achievement\\_tradeoffs.pdf](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice/documents/achievement_tradeoffs.pdf).
7. J. Plucker et al., *Talent on the Sidelines: Excellence Gaps and America’s Persistent Talent Underclass* (Storrs, CT: University of Connecticut, Center for Education Policy Analysis, 2013), <http://cepa.uconn.edu/mindthegap>.
8. C. Finn, Jr. and B. Wright, *Failing Our Brightest Kids: The Global Challenge of Educating High-Ability Students* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2015).
9. Ibid.
10. See, for example, A. Churchill, “Unless They Want to Flunk Virtually all High-Poverty Schools, Policymakers Should Go for Growth” (Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, May 17, 2017), <https://edexcellence.net/articles/unless-they-want-to-flunk-virtually-all-high-poverty-schools-policymakers-should-go-for>.
11. For many reasons why proficiency rates are problematic, see M. Polikoff, et al., “A Letter to the U.S. Department of Education,” MorganPolikoff.com, updated July 14, 2016, <https://morganpolikoff.com/2016/07/12/a-letter-to-the-u-s-department-of-education>.
12. Secretary DeVos, Letter to States Regarding Consolidated State Plans (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, February 10, 2017), <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/170210.html>.

13. ESSA State Plan Submission (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, retrieved July 6, 2017), <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/statesubmission.html>.
14. D. Figlio and S. Loeb, "School Accountability," in *Handbooks in Economics: Economics of Education*, Volume 3, eds. E. Hanushek et al., (The Netherlands: North-Holland, 2011), 383–421, [https://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Accountability\\_Handbook.pdf](https://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Accountability_Handbook.pdf).
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Based on contents of state plans reviewed for this report. See ESSA State Plan Submission (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, retrieved October 31, 2017), <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/statesubmission.html>.
19. Two states earn marks of not applicable. Montana received one for its annual school labels because its deciding between summative ratings that are text based, which would likely earn it a medium grade, and those that are similar to A–F, five-star, and numeric ratings, which would earn it a strong grade. And New York received one for its fairness to high poverty schools because it does not provide enough detail in its plan to determine the importance of growth in its system.
20. Figure 1 does not display Montana because it hasn't decided which summative ratings it will use.
21. The color of each state's bar corresponds to the grade it received for this objective. Green indicates strong, yellow indicates medium, and red indicates weak. See the section on methods for more information. Figure 2 does not display Nebraska or New York. New York received a strong grade, and Nebraska received a medium. But neither state assigns indicators specific weights, so we're unable to plot them on this figure. See their individual state profiles for more information.
22. Note that New York received a strong grade but it isn't displayed in Figure 2. It doesn't assign indicators specific weights, so we're unable to plot it on the figure.
23. Note that Nebraska received a medium grade but it isn't displayed in Figure 2. It doesn't assign indicators specific weights, so we're unable to plot it on the figure.
24. The color of each state's bar corresponds to the grade it received for this objective. Green indicates strong, yellow indicates medium, and red indicates weak. See the section on methods for more information. Figure 3 does not display Nebraska or New York. Nebraska received a medium rating, and New York received a mark of not applicable. But neither state assigns indicators specific weights, so we're unable to plot them on this figure. See their individual state profiles for more information.
25. L. Camera, "Education Shifts to the States," *U.S. News & World Report*, December 9, 2015, <https://www.usnews.com/news/the-report/articles/2015/12/09/new-federal-education-law-shifts-power-to-states>.
26. See Alabama's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 26, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/alconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
27. See Alaska's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/akconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
28. See Arizona's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 9, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/azcsa2017.pdf>.
29. See Arkansas's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/arconsolidatedstateplans.pdf>.

## ENDNOTES

30. See California's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/caconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
31. See Colorado's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 9, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/cocsa2017.pdf>.
32. See Connecticut's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on April 21, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/ctcsa2017.pdf>.
33. See Delaware's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on April 3, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/decsa2017.pdf>.
34. See the District of Columbia's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 2, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/dccsa2017.pdf>.
35. See Florida's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 20, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/flconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
36. See Georgia's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/gaconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
37. See Hawaii's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 21, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/hiconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
38. See Idaho's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/idconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
39. See Illinois's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 2, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/ilcsa2017.pdf>.
40. See Indiana's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/essa/essa-consolidated-plan.pdf>.
41. See Iowa's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/iaconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
42. Iowa uses an achievement measure that comprises both scale scores and a proficiency rate. It also uses a series of indicator weights that change over a three-year period. This total is therefore the average over that three-year period of the sum of Iowa's growth measure and one-half of its achievement indicator.
43. See Kansas's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/ksconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
44. See Kentucky's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/kyconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
45. Kentucky's weights are not yet set. Its plan says, "Standards setting will confirm the weighting of the indicators in the overall rating" and provides a table that shows "the lower and upper ranges possible for each indicator." For the purpose of this evaluation, we've used the median percentage in each range.
46. See Louisiana's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 3, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/lacsa2017.pdf>.
47. See Maine's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 4, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/mecsa2017.pdf>.

## ENDNOTES

48. See Maryland's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/mdconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
49. See Massachusetts's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 10, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/macsa2017.pdf>, and Massachusetts's additional information, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 10, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/maadditionalinfo.pdf>.
50. See Michigan's revised ESSA plan, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 6, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/micsa2017.pdf>.
51. See Minnesota's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/mnconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
52. Minnesota will use five indicators to differentiate among schools that serve elementary and middle school grades. Two of those are growth to proficiency measures—one for ELA and one for math. The state doesn't specify weights, so 40 percent is based on those two indicators making up 40 percent of the indicators used for these schools.
53. See Mississippi's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/msconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
54. See Missouri's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/moconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
55. See Montana's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 14, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/mtconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
56. Although the weight that Montana assigns to growth isn't enough to earn it medium ratings for its focus on all students or fairness to high-poverty schools, it's worth noting that the state nevertheless assigns growth more weight than any other single indicator.
57. See Nebraska's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 22, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/neconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
58. See Nevada's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on April 12, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/nvcsa2017.docx>.
59. See New Hampshire's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 24, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/nhconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
60. See New Jersey's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 3, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/njcsa2017.pdf>.
61. See New Mexico's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on April 11, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/nmcsa2017.pdf>; New Mexico's state plan appendices, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on April 11, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/nmappendices17.pdf>.
62. See New York's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/accountability/essa/documents/nys-essa-technical-plan-draft-9-18-17-to-usdoe.pdf>.
63. See North Carolina's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/ncconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.

## ENDNOTES

64. See North Dakota's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 5, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/ndcsa2017.pdf>.
65. See Ohio's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/ohconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
66. See Oklahoma's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/okconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
67. In Oklahoma the scale scores that count towards the second objective—the focus on all students—also work as a growth measure for economically disadvantaged students, so the measure also counts toward the third objective (fairly holding high-poverty schools accountable).
68. See Oregon's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 3, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/orcsa2017.pdf>.
69. See Pennsylvania's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/paconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
70. Pennsylvania doesn't assign exact weights to its indicators, instead opting for a two-step process of identifying elementary and middle schools for support. The first step, however, is the most important, and uses a four-quadrant plot that considers proficiency and student growth equally. A school is only identified for support if it has both low growth and a low proficiency rate. Because of these conditions, we believe that assigning growth a weight of 50 percent makes sense for this analysis, given our methodology. See pages 50–53 of Pennsylvania's state plan request.
71. Ibid.
72. See Rhode Island's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/riconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
73. See South Carolina's State Plan Request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on October 13, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/scconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
74. See South Dakota's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/sdconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
75. See Tennessee's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 3, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/tncsa2017.pdf>.
76. See Texas's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 25, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/txconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
77. For elementary and middle schools, Texas will assign annual A–F summative grades by looking at the better of a school's proficiency rate or student growth (not both), and “averaging that composite with the Closing the Gaps domain, which must account for at least 30 percent of the overall rating.” This means that in a school with, for example, high proficiency but low growth, student growth for all students will not be something for which it's held accountable. And this is apt to lead such schools to disregard the needs of higher-achieving children.
78. For elementary and middle schools, Texas will assign annual A–F summative grades by looking at the better of a school's proficiency rate or student growth (not both), and “averaging that composite with the Closing the Gaps domain, which must account for at least 30 percent of the overall rating.” Proficiency rates and all other achievement measures are strongly correlated with prior achievement—and given that low-income students tend to enter school far behind their peers, high-poverty schools are likely to fare poorly under such measures, no matter how effective the school and its teachers

- are. Growth measures, however, quantify changes in achievement over time, independent of whether students start as high or low performers; hence they're less correlated with poverty. Therefore, Texas's system is very fair to schools with high rates of poverty because it allows them to ignore their proficiency rate altogether and focus on what's under their control—growth.
- 79.** See Utah's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/utconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
  - 80.** See Vermont's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 3, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/vtcsa2017.pdf>.
  - 81.** Forty percent is the maximum weight that can be assigned to Vermont's measure of growth for all students. Depending on circumstances, however, that weight can be as low as 35 percent for a given school.
  - 82.** See Virginia's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 21, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/vaconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
  - 83.** See Washington's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/waconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
  - 84.** See West Virginia's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 21, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/wvconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
  - 85.** See Wisconsin's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/wiconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
  - 86.** See Wyoming's state plan request, submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 21, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/wyconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>.
  - 87.** M. Polikoff et al., "A Letter to the U.S. Department of Education," MorganPolikoff.com, updated July 12, 2016, <https://morganpolikoff.com/2016/07/12/a-letter-to-the-u-s-department-of-education>.
  - 88.** For more detailed information of measures of academic growth, see K. Castellano and A. Ho, *A Practitioner's Guide to Growth Models*, Council of Chief State School Officers (February 2013), <http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2013GrowthModels.pdf>.
  - 89.** Explanations of these models come from M. Petrilli et al., *High Stakes for High Achievers: State Accountability in the Age of ESSA* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, August 2016, <http://edex.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/08.31%20-%20High%20Stakes%20for%20High%20Achievers%20-%20State%20Accountability%20in%20the%20Age%20of%20ESSA.pdf>).