



# ARKANSAS

## Accountability System Fact Sheet



### The Every Student Succeeds Act

In December 2015, Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), returning power back to the states for the creation of their education accountability systems. States now have a tremendous opportunity to involve a diverse group of business and community leaders in the development of ambitious goals and metrics for their unique student population and economic environment. This new law replaces the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which has been in place since 2002. The biggest shift in ESSA is that the law gives much greater flexibility for the design of statewide accountability systems. The law does preserve the requirement for states to have a system that addresses data by race, income and learning needs; to test in at least math and reading in grades 3-8 and once in high school as well as science in grade spans, and to identify low-performing schools requiring intervention.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce as well as many state and local chambers across the country, have a long and successful history of advocating on behalf of rigorous academic expectations for all students to prepare them for college and career. In the next two years, the business community has an important role to play in ensuring that every state sets high goals and puts a plan in place to measure and meet those goals. Despite giving states more control, ESSA does require the following:

- Each state must implement a state-designed accountability system that includes long-term goals, such as percentage of growth in third-

grade reading for African-American students, measured by annual indicators, such as the end-of-year statewide reading exam;

- States must include academic indicators, such as student growth and proficiency, and school quality or student success indicators such as student or educator engagement, school climate and post-secondary readiness;
- States must report annually on the progress made in each of their schools;
- States must identify at least 5 percent of their lowest-performing Title I schools, high schools that fail to graduate one-third or more of their students, and schools for which a subgroup of students is consistently underperforming over a period of time, determined by the state, as needing *comprehensive* support;
- States must annually identify any school with a portion of its students that are consistently underperforming, based on all of the indicators in the state accountability system, as needing *targeted* intervention and support; and
- States and districts must work with the identified low-performing schools to determine the appropriate interventions to support student outcomes.

Prior to the passage of ESSA, NCLB required states to make adequate yearly progress toward 100 percent student proficiency in English/language arts and math on state tests by the 2013-2014 school year; otherwise, schools were deemed “in need of improvement” and subject to consequences. In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education implemented

a waiver program offering states the opportunity to apply for flexibility from key provisions of the law. In exchange for additional prescriptive federal requirements, states that received a waiver had more flexibility in setting goals for schools, determining how to measure school performance, and identifying which schools needed additional support.

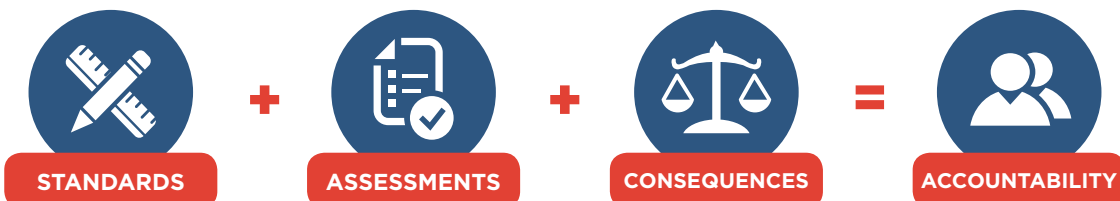
The U.S. Department of Education has already begun the rulemaking process to develop ESSA regulations

and guidance. It is important that the business community is engaged in this process leading up to the 2017-2018 timeline for when states must implement a new accountability system. The business community can and should be a vocal advocate for the necessary elements of an accountability system that ensures all students are receiving a high-quality education that will prepare them for college and the demands of today's workforce.

## What is accountability, and what are the principles of a good accountability system?

Accountability is a process for determining how well districts and schools are serving students and taking action when a district or school is not achieving the desired outcomes. There is no silver bullet to creating an effective accountability system. There are, however, core principles of a strong state accountability system, which include:

- 1 HIGH EXPECTATIONS:** College and career ready state standards, annual assessments aligned to those standards, and a rigorous benchmark for proficiency on the state assessments;
- 2 CLEAR AND AMBITIOUS STATEWIDE GOALS FOCUSED ON BOOSTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND CLOSING ACHIEVEMENT GAPS:** These goals need to be established at a minimum in reading and math assessment results as well as graduation rates;
- 3 ACCESSIBLE AND DISAGGREGATED DATA:** School and district performance results, disaggregated by race, income and learning needs, that are publicly reported in a clear and transparent way;
- 4 STRAIGHTFORWARD SCHOOL RATINGS:** Easily explained school ratings or labels are based on a core set of accountability measures focused on student performance as well as progress for all groups of students; and
- 5 EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTION PLAN:** States require proven and effective interventions and appropriate consequences for schools that are not meeting their goals.



## What is in Arkansas' current accountability system?

The U.S. Department of Education renewed Arkansas' amended waiver request for additional flexibility in August 2015. The waivers expire this year, although school accountability determinations and consequences from the 2015-2016 school year will carry forward through the 2016-2017 school year.

### STANDARDS/ASSESSMENTS

In 2010, Arkansas adopted college- and career-ready standards in English/language arts and math. Last spring, the state administered the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments, which measure students against challenging academic expectations. As a result, Arkansas' latest student test results more closely reflect proficiency rates identified by the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), indicating parents and teachers are now getting more accurate information about student readiness.

### ACCOUNTABILITY GOALS, PROGRESS MEASURES AND ANNUAL INDICATORS

Arkansas currently includes the following indicators in the accountability system: student performance, defined as the percentage of students scoring proficient in literacy and math, the percentage meeting annual expected growth in literacy and math, and graduation rates.

### SCHOOL IDENTIFICATION

Arkansas uses a classification structure to identify schools; specifically, schools are categorized as either Exemplary Schools, Focus Schools, Priority Schools, Achieving or Needs Improvement. Arkansas will use an A-F rating system to rank schools in its state accountability system; however, the transition to the A-F system is paused while the state implements a new testing system.

## What questions should I be asking my state leaders?

1. How is our state ensuring that we are meeting the learning needs of all students?
2. Is our state transparent and timely with how student performance data is reported and providing this information in a parent-friendly format?
3. What information are parents given, when and by whom? How does this level of disclosure compare to surrounding states?
4. Are we holding schools accountable for the right things? What are the indicators, and how are they calculated and weighted? How are indicators that focus on academic learning used to be a "much greater" part of the overall system?
5. Is our state's school grading or classification system easily understandable for parents and the public?
6. How are we ensuring that struggling schools and students are properly identified and supported?
7. What is our state doing to ensure that districts are implementing evidence-based interventions in schools?



## Where do I go for more information?

**ARKANSAS ACCOUNTABILITY WEBSITE:** [www.arkansased.gov/divisions/public-school-accountability](http://www.arkansased.gov/divisions/public-school-accountability)

**U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION:** [www.achievetomorrow.org](http://www.achievetomorrow.org)

**HONESTY GAP:** [www.honestygap.org](http://www.honestygap.org)

**EDUCATION TRUST:** [www.edtrust.org](http://www.edtrust.org)

