Delaware

THREE STARS OUT OF FOUR

Several features of Delaware's accountability system give high schools an incentive to focus on their high-achieving students. Rewarding schools that help students achieve at an advanced level on state tests would further improve the system.

The Purpose of This Analysis

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

NCLB meant well (as did many state accountability systems that preceded it), but it had a pernicious flaw: it strongly incentivized schools to focus exclusively on low-performing students' "proficiency" and high school graduation rates, ignoring the educational needs of high achievers, who were likely to pass state reading and math tests and earn a diploma regardless of what happened in the classroom. This may be why the United States has seen significant achievement growth and much higher graduation rates for its lowest-performing students over the last twenty years but smaller gains for its top students.

Starting in 2011, former secretary of education Arne Duncan offered waivers to states that wanted the flexibility to redesign their accountability systems. In particular, states were allowed to incorporate the use of real student growth measures into their school determinations. This was a much fairer way of evaluating schools' impact on student achievement than looking only at proficiency rates, which are strongly correlated with student demographics, family circumstance, and prior achievement. And, just as significantly, well-designed growth measures can eliminate the temptation for schools to ignore their high achievers.

In 2015, Congress replaced NCLB and its waivers with the ESSA, which maintains NCLB's requirement that states assess students annually in grades 3–8 and once in high school. Under ESSA, states must now use four types of indicators to rate high schools: academic achievement (which can include student growth); graduation rates; growth toward English proficiency for English language learners; and at least one other valid, reliable indicator of school quality or student success. Furthermore, each of the academic indicators (1–3) must carry "substantial" weight and, in the aggregate, must count "much more" than the fourth.

To help states make the most of the ESSA opportunity, we have reviewed how well their present, intended, or most recently employed accountability systems serve high achievers. If a state's system doesn't do a satisfactory job of incentivizing schools to focus on high achievers, we believe that strengthens the case for changing it materially.

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

Here we examine Delaware's system for rating high school performance during the 2015–16 school year—the most recent year for which information is available. We do not examine the quality of the state's standards, tests, or sanctions for low performance.

Part I of this report, released in August 2016, examined Delaware's rating systems for elementary and middle schools.[1]

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

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

1. **For the first academic indicator required by ESSA (academic achievement), give high schools incentives for getting more students to an advanced level.** Under ESSA, states will continue to track the percentage of students who attain proficiency on state tests. They should also give high schools incentives for getting students to an advanced level (such as level four on Smarter Balanced or level five on PARCC). For example, they might create an achievement index that gives schools partial credit for getting students to a basic level, full credit for getting students to a proficient level, and additional credit for getting students to an advanced level. (It's not entirely clear from the Department of Education's proposed regulations whether this will be allowed, though we don't see anything in the law prohibiting it.)

2. **Use the flexibility provided by ESSA to rate high schools using a true growth model—that is, one that includes the progress of individual students at all achievement levels and not just those who are low-performing or below the "proficient" line.** Regrettably, some states still don't consider individual student growth, don't use it at the high school level, or use a growth-to-proficiency system that continues to encourage schools to ignore the needs of students above (or far above) the proficient level. Using true growth models—such as those that estimate a school's value added or median growth percentile— is preferable.

3. **When determining summative high school ratings, make growth—across the achievement spectrum—count at least as much as achievement.** The Department of Education's proposed regulations under ESSA require states to combine multiple factors into summative school ratings, probably through an index. Each of the first three indicators (achievement, graduation rate, and progress toward English proficiency) must carry "substantial" weight. In our view, states should (and, under ESSA, are free to) make growth count at least as much as achievement does. Otherwise, schools will continue to face an incentive to ignore their high performers. (States that don't yet roll their indicators up to a summative rating for the school receive a "not applicable" designation here.)

4. **Include an indicator that gives high schools an incentive to help able students earn college credit before they graduate.** One "indicator of school quality or student success" should be the percentage of students who earn college credit via AP, IB, and/or dual-enrollment programs, which are among the best ways to challenge high performers. It's important that states focus on actual attainment of college credit or the equivalent, not just participation in these programs, lest the incentives encourage the wrong behavior by schools: shoving students into AP, IB, and/or dual enrollment even if they are not prepared to succeed, leading to frustration on their part and potentially harming the experience of their higher-achieving peers. Let us also acknowledge the questionable value of many of today's dual-enrollment programs. Students are often taught not by college professors but by high school teachers, and the "college credit" earned doesn't always transfer to bona fide colleges. States should therefore encourage more high schools to offer AP and IB courses because those come with external exams, which ensure program quality and rigor.

DOES DELAWARE'S HIGH SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM PRIORITIZE HIGH ACHIEVERS?

INDICATOR	RATINGS	NOTES
1. Does the state rate high schools' academic achievement using a model that gives additional credit for students achieving at an advanced level?		Delaware does not give additional credit for students achieving at an advanced level.[2] (See Exhibits A and B.)
2. Does the state rate high schools' growth using a model that includes the progress of all individual students, not just those below the "proficient" line?		Delaware uses a gain score model.[3] A gain score model measures the absolute improvemvent in students' achievement (in points) using a common scale.
3. When calculating summative high school ratings, does the state assign at least as much weight to "growth for all students" as it does to achievement?		At the high school level, "growth for all students" counts for 45 percent of summative school ratings, while achievement counts for 25 percent.[4] (See Exhibit A.)
4. Does the state rate high schools' success in helping students earn college credit before graduating via AP, IB, and/or dual-enrollment programs?		Delaware high schools earn points for students who score a three or higher on AP exams, or a four or higher on IB exams.[5] (See Exhibit B.)

EXHIBIT A[6]

Delaware Department of Education

Delaware School Success Framework

Appoquinimink High School

Address
1080 Bunker Hill Road, Middletown, DE 19709

Phone
(302) 449-3840

Website
www.apposchooldistrict.com/

District
Appoquinimink School District

Principal
Keisha Brinkley

Grades Served
9-11

Demographics

Total Enrollment	1552
American Indian/ Native American	0.3%
African American	25.8%
Asian	4.3%
Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	0.2%
Hispanic	5.2%
White	63.1%
Multiracial	1.2%
Combined Student Groups (Student Gap Group)	39.5%
Low Income	10.1%
Students with Disabilities	8.9%
English Language Learners	0.5%

Post-Secondary Outcomes

The percent of students who complete education and career training beyond high school. Students who do so have a greater likelihood of future employment with higher wages.

School Narrative

AHS is extremely proud of the growth and performance of the academic, athletic, and extracurricular programs in the school's brief history. We have earned recognition in the arts, sports and numerous co-curricular organizations. Twice, we have been selected by the College Board for the National AP Honor Roll (2012, 2014), and in 2015 we were named the number one high school in the state by U.S. News & World Report. Athletically, AHS boasts many successes as it competes in the Blue Hen Conference, Flight A. We are the home of the 2015 Baseball State Champions. Many extracurricular programs offer opportunities to excel beyond the classroom. The music department offers students opportunities to participate in Symphonic Band, Orchestra, and an award-winning Marching Band, or one of the concert choirs. The JROTC participates in training and service activities. Students can participate and compete in one of many vocational student organizations such as BPA, DECA, FFA, FCCLA, and TSA.

School Overall Performance

Academic Achievement

25% of Overall Performance

Students that are proficient have a greater likelihood of entry and success in education and career training beyond high school.

Academic Growth

45% of Overall Performance

Schools with strong growth demonstrate a greater ability to improve student learning over time.

On Track to Graduation

20% of Overall Performance

Students who are on-track are more likely to complete high school on time, as well as succeed in education and training beyond high school.

College & Career Preparation

10% of Overall Performance

Students that demonstrate early success increase their likelihood of entry and success in education and career training beyond high school.

Legend: What do the stars mean?

School Environment

The 5Essentials Survey allows students and staff in grades 4-12 to share their perspectives on the essential conditions for learning.

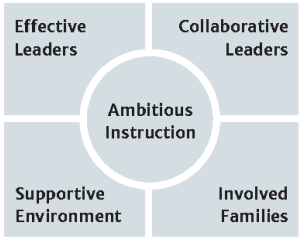
Effective Leaders: The principal works with teachers to implement a clear and strategic vision for school success.

Collaborative Teachers: The staff is committed to the school, receives strong professional development, and works together to improve the school.

Involved Families: The entire school staff builds strong relationships with families and communities to support learning.

Supportive Environment: The school is safe and orderly. Teachers have high expectations for students. Students are supported by their teachers and peers.

Ambitious Instruction: Classes are academically demanding and engage students by emphasizing the application of knowledge.



Legend

- Very Strong
- Strong
- Neutral
- Weak
- Very Weak
- Not Available This Year

Response Rates

Student	N/A	**Teacher**	N/A

EXHIBIT B[7]

Appoquinimink High School Delaware School Success Framework

Academic Performance

Proficiency in English Language Arts
Percent of students who are on grade level in English Language Arts

School	46.8%
District	61.2%
State	50.4%
National	46.6%

Proficiency in Mathematics
Percent of students who are on grade level in Mathematics

School	35.9%
District	47.7%
State	36.0%
National	36.4%

Proficiency in Science
Percent of students who are on grade level in Science

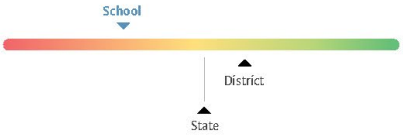
School	46.9%
District	64.7%
State	41.6%

Proficiency in Social Studies
Percent of students who are on grade level in Social Studies

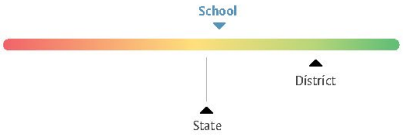
School	54.2%
District	70.7%
State	46.1%

Academic Growth

Growth in English Language Arts
The relative academic progress that students are demonstrating in English Language Arts



Growth in Mathematics
The relative academic progress that students are demonstrating in Mathematics



On Track to Graduation

On Track in 9th Grade
Percent of 9th graders earning the credits necessary to be on-track to graduate from high school in four years

School	99.8%
District	98.0%
State	89.9%

Four-Year Graduation Rate (Class of 2014)
Percent of students who graduate from high school within the traditional four-year time frame

School	95.3%
District	94.7%
State	84.4%

Five-Year Graduation Rate (Class of 2013)
Percent of students who graduate from high school within five years

School	91.8%
District	88.3%
State	81.1%

Six-Year Graduation Rate (Class of 2012)
Percent of students who graduate from high school within six years

School	94.0%
District	92.6%
State	81.3%

College & Career Preparation

College & Career Preparation
Percent of students who have demonstrated preparation for education and career training after high school through Smarter Balanced, AP, IB coursework, SAT, Career and Technical Education Pathway (technical skills attainment), and dual enrollment

School	76.5%
District	80.1%
State	69.4%

For More Information

Visit *www.dssf.doe.k12.de.us* to see online frameworks for all schools and districts in Delaware.

Endnotes

1. Michael J. Petrilli, et al., *High Stakes for High Achievers: State Accountability in the Age of ESSA*, pages 61–66, (District of Columbia: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2016), https://edexcellence.net/publications/high-stakes-for-high-achievers.

2. "Delaware School Success Framework Reference Guide," Delaware Department of Education, page 6, accessed July 11, 2016, http://www.doe.k12.de.us/cms/lib09/DE01922744/Centricity/Domain/404/Delaware%20School%20Success%20Framework%20Reference%20Document-Updated12.15-1.26.pdf.

3. "Delaware School Accountability Growth Model FAQs," Delaware Department of Education, pages 1–4, accessed July 12, 2016, http://www.doe.k12.de.us/cms/lib09/DE01922744/Centricity/Domain/309/Delaware%20School%20Accountability%20Growth%20Model%20FAQ%2010142015.pdf.

4. "Delaware School Success Framework Reference Guide," page 6.

5. Ibid., 18–19.

6. "Delaware School Success Framework," Delaware Department of Education, Appoquinimink High School, accessed July 12, 2016, http://dssf.doe.k12.de.us/pdf/24_Appoquinimink_High_School_2015.pdf.

7. Ibid.