Maryland

ZERO STARS OUT OF THREE

With an accountability system based on proficiency and graduation rates, Maryland gives high schools a strong incentive to ignore their high-achieving students.

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 Maryland'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 Maryland'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 MARYLAND'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?	☆	Maryland does not rate high schools' academic achievement.[2]
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?	☆	Maryland does not rate high schools' growth.[3]
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?	NA	Maryland does not calculate summative school ratings.[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?	☆	Maryland does not rate high schools' success in helping students earn college credit before graduating.[5]

EXHIBIT A[6]

Mountain Ridge High School

Allegany County (01:2404)

Attendance Rate %	School 2015	School 2014	County 2015	County 2014	State 2015	State 2014
Elementary	*	*	≥ 95.0	≥ 95.0	95.4	95.7
Middle	*	*	94.3	94.5	95.0	95.4
High	93.3	93.1	93.6	93.2	92.4	92.7

Cohort Graduation Rate%			
Class of 2014 (4-Year Rate)	87.88	91.51	86.39
Class of 2014 (5-Year Rate)	87.88	91.69	88.70

Teacher Qualifications	School 2015	School 2014	County 2015	County 2014	State 2015	State 2014
% of certificates:						
Standard Professional	5.7	7.9	11.0	11.5	27.4	27.2
Advanced Professional	91.4	89.5	88.3	87.0	65.2	65.5
Resident Teacher	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.1	0.7
Conditional Teacher	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.5	1.0
% of classes NOT taught by highly qualified teachers						
All Quartiles	0.8	1.2	0.4	0.7	8.4	7.6
Elementary Low Poverty	*	*	*	*	2.9	3.0
Elementary High Poverty	*	*	0.0	0.0	10.5	11.4
Secondary Low Poverty	*	*	*	*	6.7	6.0
Secondary High Poverty	*	*	0.0	0.0	17.7	15.7

"" indicates no students or fewer than 10 students in category.*

Attendance Rate

Attendance Rate is the percentage of students in school for at least half of the average school day during the school year. Attendance is a school accountability measure for elementary and middle schools. Yearly targets were set for attendance so that by the end of school year 2013-14, the State, schools, and school systems would achieve and maintain an attendance rate of at least 94 percent.

Cohort Graduation Rate

The U.S. Department of Education now requires each state to use an adjusted cohort graduation rate for school accountability. The adjusted cohort graduation rate ensures that all students who entered 9th grade together are counted in the graduation rate at the end of 4 years and at the end of 5 years.

The cohort graduation rate data for 2014 is the 4-year rate for the student cohort entering grade nine for the first time in fall 2010 and graduating no later than 2014. The 2014 5-year rate is the same cohort graduating no later than 2015.

Teacher Qualifications

The percentage of teachers in each category is based on the number of teachers who have credentials and are teaching core academic subjects as defined by the federal government under the No Child Left Behind Act. The core academic subjects are English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography. Teachers who are teaching other subjects are not included in the totals.

Standard Professional Certificate. A Standard Professional Certificate indicates the teacher meets all certification requirements.

Advanced Professional Certificate. The Advanced Professional Certificate requires three years of satisfactory professional school-related experience, and a master's degree or a minimum of 36 semester hours of post baccalaureate course work.

Resident Teacher Certificate. The Resident Teacher Certificate is issued to a teacher in an approved alternative preparation program at the request of a local school system superintendent.

Conditional Teacher Certificate. The Conditional Certificate is issued only at the request of a local school system superintendent to an applicant who has a bachelor's degree but does not meet all certification requirements.

Highly Qualified Teachers. "Highly qualified" is specifically defined by federal law. Teachers must meet minimum requirements both in content knowledge and teaching skills. Teachers must have a bachelor's degree, full State certification, and demonstrate content knowledge in the subjects they teach.

School Progress and Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs)

On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In accordance with the U.S. Department of Education's (USED) authority to ensure an orderly transition to ESSA, USED will not require States to identify AMOs for school years 2014-2015 or 2015-2016 for USED's review and approval, nor will USED require States to report performance against AMOs for the 2014-2015 or 2015-2016 school years.

Due to this direction, Maryland will not measure LEAs and schools against AMOs.

Endnotes

1. Michael J. Petrilli, et al., *High Stakes for High Achievers: State Accountability in the Age of ESSA*, pages 134–138, (District of Columbia: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2016), https://edexcellence.net/publications/high-stakes-for-high-achievers.

2. "2016 Maryland Report Card," Maryland Department of Education, accessed October 10, 2016, http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. "2015 Maryland Report Card – Mountain Ridge High School," Maryland Department of Education, accessed July 12, 2016, http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/printreports/2015/01/SchoolReports/English/012404_2015ReportCard.pdf.