

NEW JERSEY



New Jersey's accountability system rewards high schools that help students earn college credit before graduating. It should also reward those that help them achieve at an advanced level on state tests.

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 New Jersey's system for rating high school performance during the 2014–15 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 New Jersey'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 NEW JERSEY’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?		New Jersey does not give additional credit for students achieving at an advanced level. (See Exhibit A.)
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?		New Jersey does not estimate growth at the high school level.
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	New Jersey does not have a system for calculating summative school ratings. ²
4. Does the state rate high schools’ success in helping students earn college credit before graduating via AP, IB, and/or dual-enrollment programs?		New Jersey rates high schools’ success in helping students earn college credit before graduation, via AP or IB. (See Exhibit B.)

EXHIBIT A³



ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
ATLANTIC
ATLANTIC CITY

State of New Jersey
2014-15

GRADE SPAN 09-12

01-0110-010
ATLANTIC CITY HIGH SCHOOL
1400 N ALBANY AVENUE
ATLANTIC CITY, NJ 08401-6153

The Academic Achievement section measures the content knowledge that students have in English Language Arts/Literacy (ELA/L), Mathematics and Biology as demonstrated in 2014-2015 *Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers* (PARCC) assessments and the End-of-Course Biology assessment. The below chart consist of three columns with measures. The first column - Schoolwide Performance - below includes the percentage of students who met or exceeded expectations in ELA/L or Math. The middle column - Peer School Percentile - indicates how the school's outcomes compare to its group of peer schools. The last column - Statewide Percentile - indicates how the school's outcomes compare to schools across the state in ELA/L.

Academic Achievement	Schoolwide Performance	Peer Percentile	State Percentile
HS English Language Arts/Literacy Met or Exceeded Expectation	27%	68	30
Math Met or Exceeded Expectation	14%		

ESEA Waiver - English Language Arts/Literacy

This table presents, for each subgroup in the school, the total number of valid test scores, the percentage of students who met or exceeded expectations, the assessment participation goal, and the participation rate. The participation goal is established as 95% by the United States Department of Education.

Sub groups	Valid Scores	% Meeting Standards	Participation Goal	Participation Rate	Met Participation?
Schoolwide	680	27%	95%	84.4%	NO
White	90	51.1%	95%	88.7%	YES*
African American	161	11.8%	95%	73.6%	NO
Hispanic	255	14.9%	95%	82.8%	NO
American Indian	-	-	--	--	--
Asian	159	49.7%	95%	96.8%	YES
Two or More Races	-	-	--	--	--
Students with Disability	-	-	--	--	--
English Learner Students	-	-	--	--	--
Economically Disadvantaged Students	515	23.1%	95%	82.5%	NO

YES* = Met Participation Rate (Participation Averaging applied)

Data is presented for subgroups when the count is high enough under ESEA Waiver suppression rules.

EXHIBIT B⁴



State of New Jersey
2014-15

01-0110-010
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COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

ATLANTIC
ATLANTIC CITY

GRADE SPAN 09-12

Students in high schools begin to demonstrate college readiness behaviors long before they actually graduate from high school. Among those behaviors are taking college entrance exams and challenging themselves with rigorous course work. The table below presents five such indicators: the percentage of students enrolled in the 12th grade who took the SAT or ACT, the percentage of 10th and 11th graders who took the PSAT, the percentage of students who scored above the SAT benchmark of 1550, the percentage of 11th and 12th graders who took at least one AP or IB test in English, math, social studies or science, and the percentage of those AP or IB tests that were scored a 3 or higher.

The below chart consist of five columns with measures. The first column - Schoolwide Performance - represents the outcomes for these particular indicators in the school. The second column - Peer School Percentile - indicates how the school's performance compares to its group of peer schools. The third column - Statewide Percentile - indicates how the school's performance compares to schools across the state. The fourth column - Statewide Target - provides the statewide targets for each of these indicators. The last column - Met Target? - indicates whether the School Performance met or exceeded the statewide target. The Summary row presents the averages of the peer school percentiles, the average of statewide percentiles and the percentage of statewide targets met.

College and Career Readiness Indicators	Schoolwide Performance	Peer Percentile	Statewide Percentile	Statewide Target	Met Target?
Percent of Students Participating in SAT or ACT	65%	32	19	80%	NO
Percent of Students Participating in PSAT or PLAN	100%	100	100	60%	YES
Percent of Students Scoring Above 1550 on SAT	31%	94	40	40%	NO
Percent of Students Taking at least one AP Test or IB Test in English, Math, Social Studies or Science	24%	68	57	35%	NO
Percent of AP Tests >= 3 or IB Test >= 4 in English, Math, Social Studies or Science	49%	92	35	75%	NO
Summary		77	50		20%

College Readiness Test Participation

The first column of the table below presents the percentage of students enrolled in the 12th grade who took the SAT or ACT and the percentage of students enrolled in 10th and 11th grade who took the PSAT. The second column provides the average across the school's peer group for these two metrics.

2014-15 Percent of Students	School	Peer Avg.	State Avg.
Participating in SAT	63.5%	77.8%	79.1%
Participating in ACT	15.1%		25.2%
Participating in PSAT or PLAN	100.0%	76.4%	79.6%
Participating in Dual Enrollment	0.0%		14.9%

AP/IB Participation - 'Unique' Students

The table below presents the proportion of 'unique' students enrolled in at least 11th and 12th grade i.e. each student is counted once regardless of how many AP or IB courses he/she may take. The table also presents the proportion of how many 'unique' students took at least one AP or IB test to the school's enrollment in 11th and 12th grade.

2014-15 Percent of Students Taking	School	Peer Avg.	State Avg.
One or More Course	33.9%	22.9%	36.3%
One or More Test	26.6%	22.5%	30.7%
At least one AP or IB Test in English, Math, Social Studies or Science	23.9%	19.3%	25.3%

Note: Students who are enrolled in AP/IB coursework or take AP/IB tests in grades other than 11th and 12th are included in the numerator of this calculation.

ENDNOTES

1. Michael J. Petrilli, et al., *High Stakes for High Achievers: State Accountability in the Age of ESSA*, pages 188–192, (District of Columbia: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2016), <https://edexcellence.net/publications/high-stakes-for-high-achievers>.
2. "NJ School Performance Reports – Interpretive Guide," page 3, accessed August 10, 2016, <http://www.nj.gov/education/pr/1415/NJSchoolPerformanceInterpretiveGuide.pdf>.
3. "2014-2015 School Performance Report-Atlantic City High School," New Jersey Department of Education, page 3, accessed August 10, 2016, <http://www.nj.gov/education/pr/1415/01/010110010.pdf>.
4. *Ibid.*, 13.