

SOUTH CAROLINA



ZERO STARS OUT OF THREE

South Carolina's accountability system does little to encourage high schools to focus on high achievers. Developing an individual growth measure for the high school years would 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 South Carolina'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 South Carolina'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 SOUTH CAROLINA'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?		South Carolina 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?		South Carolina has yet to develop a growth model for high schools. 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	South Carolina does not calculate summative school ratings at this time. (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?		South Carolina does a good job of reporting these data but does not rate high schools’ success in this area. ⁴ (See Exhibit B.)

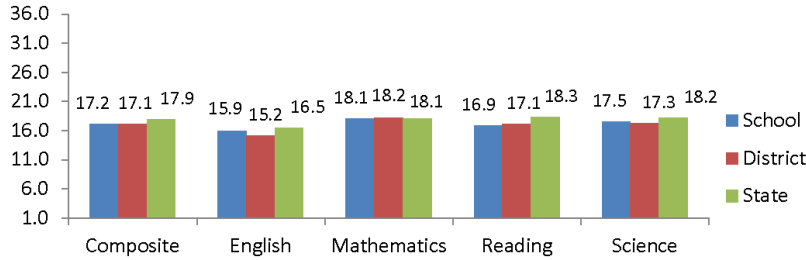
EXHIBIT A⁵

DIXIE HIGH SCHOOL

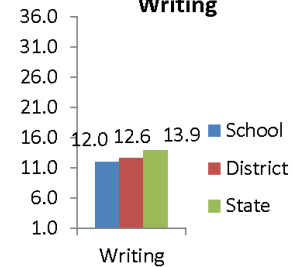
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KNOWLEDGE

Average ACT Score Achieved by Students: English, Math, Reading, Science, Composite of all four tests, 2015



Average ACT Score Achieved by Students: Writing

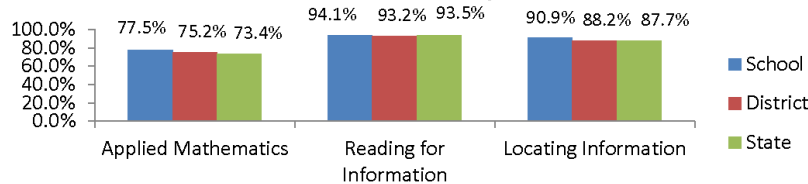


The ACT, a college readiness assessment, was given to every South Carolina 11th grader in 2015 with the exception of those eligible for alternate assessments. The ACT scores range from 0 to 36. The district and state averages are included for comparison. State averages for ACT data are based on regular public schools and do not include private schools in the state.

Percent of Students Meeting ACT College-Ready Benchmarks, 2015				
English Benchmark Score: 18	Math Benchmark Score: 22	Reading Benchmark Score: 22	Science Benchmark Score: 23	All 4 Subjects
37.5	22.7	14.8	11.4	4.5

ACT benchmarks are scores on the ACT subject-area tests that represent the level of achievement required for students to have a 50% chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75% chance of obtaining a C or higher in corresponding credit-bearing first-year college courses.

Percent of Students Meeting Platinum, Gold, or Silver Threshold on WorkKeys, 2015



ACT WorkKeys is a job skills assessment system measuring "real world" skills that employers believe are critical in the workplace. The assessment is given to every South Carolina 11th grader with the exception of those eligible for alternative assessments. The assessment consists of three subtests: Applied Mathematics, Reading for Information, and Locating Information. Students can earn certificates at the Platinum, Gold, Silver, and Bronze level on WorkKeys assessments.

The ACT is a registered trademark of ACT, Inc.

Abbreviations for Missing Data

N/A-Not Applicable N/AV-Not Available N/C-Not Collected N/R-Not Reported I/S-Insufficient Sample

EXHIBIT B⁶

DIXIE HIGH SCHOOL

3/30/2016

OPPORTUNITIES

For students to meet the profile of the SC Graduate

	Our School	Change from Last Year	High Schools with students like ours
Students (n = 430)			
Percent of students participating in Medicaid, SNAP, or TANF; homeless, foster, or migrant students (poverty index)	65.6	Down from 73.7%	N/A
Attendance Rate	95.8	Down from 97.6%	94.0
With disabilities	10.7	Up from 9.1%	11.5
Out of school suspensions or expulsions for violent and/or criminal offenses	0.0	Down from 1.4%	0.9
Percentage of students served by gifted and talented programs	3.3	Down from 9.1%	19.5
Enrolled in AP/IB programs	0.0	Down from 4.4%	17.4
Successful in AP/IB programs	N/A	N/A	51.3
Career/tech students in co-curricular organizations	100.0	Up from 38.1%	1.7
Enrollment in career/technology courses	129	Down from 247	920
Students participating in work-based experiences	12.4	Up from 12.1%	15.1
Number of seniors who have completed FAFSA forms	53	N/A	241
Percentage of seniors completing college applications	97.3	N/A	67.4
Number of students in dual enrollment courses	24	N/A	63
Success rate of students in dual enrollment courses	100.0	N/A	95.2
Annual dropout rate	2.1	Down from 2.8%	2.6
Dropout recovery rate	14.3	N/A	6.5
Percentage of students retained	3.0	Up from 1.5%	2.7
Teachers (n = 26)			
Percentage of teachers with advanced degrees	50.0	Down from 55.2%	67.5
Percentage of teachers on continuing contract	84.6	Down from 86.2%	83.6
Teachers returning from previous year	83.0	Down from 84.8%	88.0
Teacher attendance rate	99.7	Down from 99.8%	95.3
Average teacher salary*	\$45,885	Up 0.7%	\$50,039
Professional development days / teacher	14.7 days	Up from 10.5 days	11.2 days
Percentage of classes not taught by highly qualified teachers	4.6	Down from 7.8%	1.7
Percentage of teacher vacancies for more than 9 weeks	3.7	N/A	0.6

Evaluations by Teachers, Students, and Parents

Evaluations by Teachers, Students and Parents

	Teachers	Students*	Parents*
Number of surveys returned	29	66	53
Percent satisfied with learning environment	93.1	81.9	94.3
Percent satisfied with social and physical environment	89.7	69.2	80.8
Percent satisfied with school-home relations	86.2	83.1	58.5

* Only students in grade 11 and their parents were included.

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ENDNOTES

1. Michael J. Petrilli, et al., *High Stakes for High Achievers: State Accountability in the Age of ESSA*, pages 241–246, (District of Columbia: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2016), <https://edexcellence.net/publications/high-stakes-for-high-achievers>.
2. “2013-2014 Accountability Manual,” South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, page 36, accessed July 28, 2016, <http://www.eoc.sc.gov/Reports%20%20Publications/Current%20Reports%202008-14/Accountability/2013-14%20Accountability%20Manual/2013-14%20Accountability%20Manual.pdf>.
3. *Ibid.*, 38.
4. *Ibid.*, 36.
5. “2015 Dixie High School Annual Report Card,” South Carolina Department of Education, page 2, accessed October 17, 2016, <http://ed.sc.gov/assets/reportCards/2015/high/c/h0160003.pdf>.
6. *Ibid.*, 4.