

TENNESSEE



Tennessee includes high-achieving students in its growth model but does little else to encourage high schools to pay attention to them.

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 Tennessee'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 Tennessee'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 TENNESSEE’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?		Tennessee does not give additional credit for students achieving at an advanced level. 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?		Tennessee uses a multivariate value-added model. ³ A multivariate value-added model estimates a school’s contribution to students’ academic growth by comparing their actual growth to their expected growth based on prior achievement and other factors.
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	Tennessee does not calculate summative school ratings at this time, though state law requires that it adopt a system of letter grades by 2017–2018.
4. Does the state rate high schools’ success in helping students earn college credit before graduating via AP, IB, and/or dual-enrollment programs?		Tennessee does not rate high schools’ success in helping students earn college credit before graduating. (See Exhibit A.)

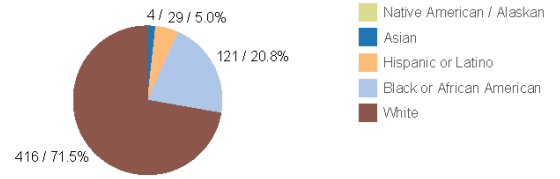
EXHIBIT A⁴

Profile

School Year	District Name	School Name
2014-2015	Alcoa	Alcoa High School

Alcoa, Alcoa High School	
Education Commissioner	Dr. Candice McQueen
District Name	Alcoa
District Director	Dr. Brian Bell
District Grades Served	PK-12
District Address 1	524 Faraday ST
District Address 2	Alcoa City Education Buil..
District City, ST ZIP	Alcoa, TN 37701-2098
School Name	Alcoa High School
School Grades Served	9-12
School Address 1	1205 Lodge ST
School City, ST ZIP	Alcoa, TN 37701
Safe School	Safe School

Student Ethnicity: Alcoa, Alcoa High School



Values reflect October 1 enrollment data

Students & Teachers: Alcoa, Alcoa High School

Students	582
Economically Disadvantaged Student Percent	36.3%
Students with Disabilities	65
Students with Disabilities Percent	11.2%
Per-Pupil Expenditure	\$10,320.00

TVAAS Composites: Alcoa, Alcoa High School

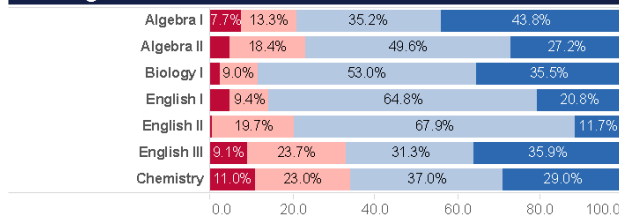


The Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) is a statistical analysis used to measure the impact of districts, schools and teachers on the academic progress rates of groups of students from year-to-year. The TVAAS Composites listed here are scores that assess growth at the school or district level based on student performance on statewide assessments across all available subjects and grades. For districts that opted to test students in grades K-2 in years in which they are available, those scores are included in the composite. The file available at the below link indicates which districts had early grades data included in their composites each year. <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/update/other/Early-grades-TVAAS-districts.xlsx>

TVAAS Composites are reported on a 1-5 scale and are one-year scores. Levels 4 and 5 indicate that a district or school is exceeding the expected growth, Level 3 indicates that they are making about the expected growth, and Levels 1 and 2 indicate that they are making less than the expected growth. The Overall TVAAS Composite includes all available data from the K-2 (SAT-10) assessment and from all applicable TCAP and EOC tests. The TVAAS Literacy Composite includes all literacy-focused tests included in the Overall TVAAS Composite. The TVAAS Numeracy Composite includes all numeracy-focused tests included in the Overall TVAAS Composite. The TVAAS Literacy and Numeracy Composite includes all tests included in the Literacy Composite and the Numeracy composite. More detailed TVAAS data can be viewed on the Public TVAAS Site (<https://tvaas.sas.com/welcome.html>).

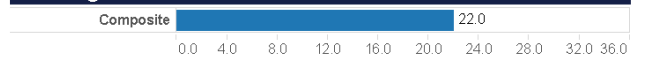
■ % Below Basic ■ % Basic ■ % Proficient ■ % Advanced

Achievement: Alcoa, Alcoa High School



The Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program, or TCAP, is a set of statewide assessments given in Tennessee to measure students' skills and progress. Students in grades 3-8 take the Achievement Test, and high school students take End of Course exams for various subjects. Student results are categorized as below basic, basic, proficient or advanced. Students that are proficient or advanced are commonly considered to be at or above grade level. Subjects with fewer than 10 valid tests and/or subjects with at least 99 percent or less than 1 percent of students scoring in any one proficiency category are suppressed in accordance with federal privacy laws.

Average ACT Composite: Alcoa, Alcoa High School



ACT is a national college admissions exam that includes subject level tests in English, Math, Reading and Science. Students receive scores that range from 1 to 36 on each subject and an overall Composite score. All Tennessee students are required to take the ACT in 11th grade.

Graduation Rate: Alcoa, Alcoa High School



The Graduation Rate measures the percentage of students who graduated from high school within four years and a summer out of those students that entered the ninth grade four years earlier.

ENDNOTES

1. Michael J. Petrilli, et al., *High Stakes for High Achievers: State Accountability in the Age of ESSA*, pages 252–256, (District of Columbia: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2016), <https://edexcellence.net/publications/high-stakes-for-high-achievers>.
2. “State Report Card,” Tennessee Department of Education, accessed July 21, 2016 <http://www.tn.gov/education/topic/report-card>.
3. “Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS),” Tennessee Department of Education, accessed July 21, 2016, <https://tvaas.sas.com/welcome.html?as=e&aj=e>.
4. “Accountability Report – 2014-2015 Alcoa High School Report Card,” Tennessee Department of Education, accessed July 21, 2016, <http://www.tn.gov/education/topic/report-card>.