

VIRGINIA



Because it is based on proficiency and graduation rates, Virginia's accountability system for high schools gives them an 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 Virginia'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 Virginia'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 VIRGINIA’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?		Virginia 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?		Virginia has developed a student growth percentile model. ³ However, because growth doesn’t count towards a school’s summative rating and isn’t publicly reported we give no credit for this indicator.
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?		Growth plays no role in determining summative high school ratings. ⁴
4. Does the state rate high schools’ success in helping students earn college credit before graduating via AP, IB, and/or dual-enrollment programs?		Virginian reports AP and dual enrollment success rates at the school level, but neither counts toward a school’s summative rating. (See Exhibit A.)

EXHIBIT A⁵



McLean High

1633 Davidson Rd, McLean, VA 22101

Fairfax County Public Schools

Principal: Ms. Ellen Reilly
(703) 714-5700

Superintendent: Dr. Karen K Garza
(571) 423-1010

The Commonwealth of Virginia is committed to providing a quality education for all students. The Virginia School Report Card provides transparent information about the performance of Virginia's schools. School accreditation and federal accountability ratings for a specific school year are based on student achievement on tests taken during the previous academic year.

State Accreditation Results for All Students

This table summarizes the data used in calculating the state accreditation status of the school and is reported for the "all students" group.

State Accreditation Results for All Students								
Subject	Accreditation Benchmark	2014 - 2015		2015 - 2016		2016 - 2017		Met Accreditation Benchmark
		1 Year	3 Year	1 Year	3 Year	1 Year	3 Year	
English	75	97	97	96	97	98	97	YES
Mathematics	70	89	88	92	89	91	91	YES
History	70	97	96	97	97	97	97	YES
Science	70	93	95	96	94	96	95	YES
Graduation and Completion Index	85	98	98	98	98	98	98	YES

Key: YES = Met benchmark based on current year results
 AB = Met benchmark based on Alternative Benchmark
 - = No data for group
 < = A group below state definition for personally identifiable results
 * = Data not yet available
 N/A = Not applicable

3YR = Met benchmark based on the 3 year average result
 4YR = Met benchmark based on the 4 year average result
 NO-A = Did not meet benchmark but is within the narrow margin
 NO-I = Did not meet benchmark but satisfies the criteria for improvement
 NO-W = Did not meet benchmark or criteria for narrow margin or improvement
 NO = Did not meet benchmark

School - Fall Membership

School membership (enrollment) is reported on September 30 of each school year.

School - Fall Membership			
Grade	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
09 - Grade 9	525	494	541
10 - Grade 10	566	520	505
11 - Grade 11	514	572	515
12 - Grade 12	487	486	542
Total Students	2,092	2,072	2,103

Key: < = A group below state definition for personally identifiable results
 - = No data for group
 * = Data not yet available

Advanced Program Information

The percentage of students enrolled in advanced programs is a key indicator of school quality at the secondary level.

School - Advanced Program Information			
Program type	Count / Percentage		
	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
Advanced Placement Test Taken Preliminary Results	946 / 45.22%	958 / 46.24%	936 / 44.51%
Advanced Placement course enrollment	954 / 45.6%	964 / 46.53%	950 / 45.17%

Key: < = A group below state definition for personally identifiable results
 - = No data for group
 * = Data not yet available

ENDNOTES

1. Michael J. Petrilli, et al., *High Stakes for High Achievers: State Accountability in the Age of ESSA*, pages 275–279, (District of Columbia: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2016), <https://edexcellence.net/publications/high-stakes-for-high-achievers>.
2. “Accountability in Virginia Public Schools,” Virginia Department of Education, pages 1–3, accessed July 29, 2016, http://www.pen.k12.va.us/statistics_reports/school_report_card/accountability_guide.pdf.
3. “Frequently Asked Questions about Student Growth Models,” Virginia Department of Education, page 1, accessed July 29, 2016, http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/scoring/student_growth_percentiles/fact_sheet.pdf.
4. “Accountability in Virginia Public Schools,” page 2.
5. “2016 Virginia High School Report Card – T.C. Williams High,” Virginia Department of Education, page 3, accessed July 29, 2016, <https://p1pe.doe.virginia.gov/reportcard/report.do?division=101&schoolName=498>.