

## SCHOOL REPORT CARDS UNDER ESSA: QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR STATE

Data on how well schools and districts are serving students, and whether all groups of students have access to key resources for learning, helps families make important decisions about their children's education. And information on the performance of historically underserved groups of students in particular — students from low-income families, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities — provides advocates and community groups with an important tool to identify critical inequities and push for change. The information is only effective, however, if it is presented in a way that is understandable (for English and non-English speakers), easily accessible, and widely available.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires states to report lots of critical information about schools. Every year, each state must publish a statewide report card, and each district must publish a district report card. District report cards must include information for the district as a whole (i.e., what percentage of Chicago Public Schools' students are graduating on time), as well as for each school in that district (i.e., what is the graduation rate at East Shore High School?). ESSA also specifies the types of information that need to be on the report cards. That information includes all of the indicators that are part of a school's accountability system (state assessment results, graduation rates, etc.) and other metrics, including access to advanced coursework, school-level funding information, and student discipline data.

But the law leaves many decisions about **how** to define and report some of these measures to states, and those decisions can have a big effect on how useful all of this information will be. Done right, these report cards should give all stakeholders the information they need to be partners in making sure all children get the opportunity and resources they need to reach their full academic potential.

State policymakers are developing new report cards under ESSA *now*. Here are some key questions you may want to ask them as your state moves to finalize its report cards as well as what to be on the lookout for in their responses.

### Questions about when and in what format the report cards will be published

#### 1) Will the state publish report cards for all districts and schools?

Although ESSA says that district report cards have to include information about each school, the best and most common practice is for the state to publish report cards for all schools and districts. This ensures that all report cards follow the same format and are located on the same website, thereby making the information easier to find and understand.

- **Watch out for:** The absence of a state plan to publish school report cards. If the state does not publish school report cards, it will make them harder to find and possibly harder to understand or compare to other schools in the state.

## 2) By when will the state publish report cards?

To maximize usefulness for parents, educators, and community advocates, report cards should be published by September of the following school year (For example, report cards for the 2017-18 school year should be available by September 2018).

- **Watch out for:** The state plans to publish report cards any later than December of the following school year or a refusal on the part of the state to commit to a timeframe.

## 3) How will the state share report cards?

The state should make report cards available to the public via the state website and should work with districts to provide report cards to families by mailing them to the families' homes and by making copies available at each district office and school.

- **Watch out for:** The state plans to have only one way of sharing the data — for example, only on the web.

## 4) Will each report card include a summary page? What will be on it?

ESSA requires states and districts to report lots of information about schools. That's a good thing, but it means that report cards could easily get bulky and hard to understand. To ensure that critical information doesn't get lost in the shuffle, all report cards should include a summary page with the most important student achievement and opportunity-to-learn data. Advocates will need to decide which of the many report card indicators belong on that summary page, but should make sure that all measures are disaggregated by student group to maintain the focus on eliminating disparities in opportunity and student outcomes.

- **Watch out for:** Failure by the state and/or districts to include a summary page or a summary page with information for all students but not individual groups of students.

## 5) Will the report cards be translated into multiple languages?

The report card should be translated into the most common languages spoken in the state.

- **Watch out for:** The absence of translated report cards.

## 6) When will the state include all of the data required by law?

Some states have a history of not reporting information that is required by law at all or reporting it in a way that makes the information nearly impossible to find. The "Critical Equity Measures" sidebar includes a list of the most important equity-related metrics required by ESSA. ***The state should include all of these data points in the report cards for the 2017-18 school year.*** (The only exception is information on per-pupil funding by school. States have until 2018-19 report cards to make that information available.) If the state does not have all of the required data, there should be a plan, including specific timelines, for including that information in the future.

- **Watch out for:** The state claims that it does not have some of the required data and does not know or can't say when the data will be available.

## Questions about data to be included on report cards

States have a lot of flexibility about how to report the data required under ESSA. That includes deciding what information goes where. For example, will performance for all groups of students appear in one place? Or will parents have to click through multiple times to find graduation rates or rates of exclusionary discipline for African American students? That flexibility also includes decisions about how to define each measure. For example, what is an “inexperienced” teacher? These definitions can make the difference between useful and useless information.

Below are specific questions to ask about key kinds of information that report cards should include.

### How will the state report on schools' accountability system results?

- 1) Will the state *display both the school rating (e.g., A-F grade) and school identification status (Comprehensive Support and Improvement, Targeted Support and Improvement, or Additional Targeted Support and Improvement) on the same page?*

Both a school's rating (e.g., A-F grade or 1-5 stars) and identification status should appear on the same page — ideally next to each other. (Note: For more information on the three school identification categories, see <https://edtrust.org/resource/whats-in-the-every-student-succeeds-act-accountability/>)

- **Watch out for:** Report cards that include only the school's rating and not whether the school has been identified for support and improvement.

- 2) Will the state *display schools' results on each of the indicators for each group of students on the same page?*

For each indicator (e.g., graduation rates or chronic absenteeism), the school's overall results should appear right next to results for each group of students the school serves. The state should also include statewide averages for each student group on each indicator to help assess how the school's performance compares to others in the state.

- **Watch out for:** Report card front pages that only include overall results and require one or more click-throughs to see results for each group of students the school serves.

- 3) What materials will the state make available to *explain how schools got their rating and identification status and the implications of each one?*

The state should provide a clear and concise description that helps you understand how the school got the rating and identification status that it receives. This information should be provided with the report card through a link or a printed fact sheet.

- **Watch out for:** The absence of information about how ratings or improvement status labels were assigned or the inclusion of information that is too complex for the average report card user to follow.

## How will the state report on funding that individual schools receive?

### 1) Will all districts *calculate per-pupil expenditures the same way*?

The state should require all districts to calculate school level per-pupil expenditures in the same way so you can compare data across districts. The report cards should include an explanation of which costs (for example, teacher salaries or student transportation) are reported at the school level, the district level, or both.

- **Watch out for:** The state plans to let districts report these data differently or a failure to explain the rules publicly.

### 2) How will the state *display per pupil expenditures*?

Spending data should appear next to data about student need (for example, percentages of students learning English as a second language, students living in poverty, and students in special education programs) to help readers understand whether existing differences in per-pupil expenditures between schools make sense.

- **Watch out for:** A list of dollar figures without the necessary context to understand whether the district is intentionally and equitably allocating its funds.

## How will the state report on access to strong teaching?

### 1) How will the state *define critical terms* such as “(in)effective,” “(in)experienced,” “out-of-field,” and “emergency or provisional credentials”?

Definitions should provide meaningful — and different — information about the types of teachers at each school.

- **Watch out for:** The use of the same definition for multiple terms or the use of definitions that group nearly all teachers in the state into the same bucket. For example, “ineffective” should not be defined the same way as “emergency or provisionally credentialed,” and, where possible, should take into account the teacher’s impact on student learning.

### 2) How will the state *display the teacher data*?

ESSA requires the state to collect and report multiple types of data on student access to strong teaching. Though the law only requires some of those data points to be published on the report cards, all data tracking student assignment to different types of teachers should be included.

- ESSA requires states to publicly report data showing whether low-income students and students of color are taught by ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers at higher rates than other students, but it does not specify that those data must be reported on report cards.
- ESSA requires states to include on report cards the numbers and percentages of teachers who are (1) inexperienced, (2) teaching with an emergency or provisional certification, or (3) not

teaching in the subject or field for which they are certified or licensed. Note that this list overlaps with the list above, but does not include “ineffective” teachers.

- ESSA also requires that report cards include comparisons in the percentage of inexperienced, uncertified, and out-of-field educators in high- and low-poverty schools, but the law does not specify that those same comparisons must be made for schools serving high and low concentrations of students of color.

To make all of this information about teachers as transparent and useful as possible, states should (1) provide all of the data that ESSA requires them to publish (assignment to ineffective, inexperienced, out-of-field, and emergency or provisionally credentialed teachers) on the report card; and (2) include comparisons not only between high and low poverty schools, but also between schools with high and low concentrations of students of color.

- **Watch out for:** (1) The state plans to only include information on inexperienced, uncertified, and out-of-field teachers on school report cards, but not teachers who are ineffective; or (2) the state does not plan to show comparisons between schools with high and low concentrations of students of color.

## How will the state report on other key opportunity-to-learn indicators from the Civil Rights Data Collection?

ESSA requires states to include on school report cards information that previously only had to be reported to the federal Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). These measures include things like school discipline, access to advanced courses, and chronic absenteeism (See CRDC section of “Critical Equity Measures Required by Law”). Here are some questions to ask about these data in particular.

### 1) Will the state report data for all groups of students, including students *from low-income families*?

The CRDC requires districts to report data for each major racial/ethnic student group, students with disabilities, and English learners, but not for students from low-income families. States should make sure to report data for all groups, including low-income students, on school report cards. They should also make sure that data for each group of students are presented together with overall schoolwide averages.

- **Watch out for:** The state plans to omit data for students from low-income families.

### 2) Which indicators related to *exclusionary discipline and school safety* will the state include on report cards?

The CRDC includes a number of different indicators related to exclusionary discipline, including data on students receiving different kinds of suspensions and expulsions. States should include on report cards separate data on students receiving (1) one or more in-school suspension, (2) one out-of-school suspension, and (3) more than one out-of-school suspension. They should also report (1) expulsions with educational services and (2) expulsions without educational services. In addition, states will need to select one or more indicators related to harassment and bullying and incidents of violence to include on

report cards. The CRDC collects a wide variety of relevant data. States should consult with stakeholders in the state to determine which of these indicators are most important to include.

- **Watch out for:** The state plans to report only a single data point on suspensions or a single data point on expulsions, and/or the state does not plan to involve stakeholder input in the process of determining what data to report regarding harassment and bullying or incidents of violence.

### 3) Will the state report on success in *advanced coursework*?

ESSA requires states to include the number and percentage of students enrolled in advanced coursework. In addition to data on enrollment, the state should include data on success in advanced coursework on school, district, and state report cards.

- **Watch out for:** The state plans to omit data on success in advanced coursework.

### 4) In reporting *preschool enrollment*, will the state include children enrolled in all licensed preschool programs?

The CRDC only asks districts to report the number of students enrolled in district-run preschool programs. In addition to these data, states should also make sure that report cards include information on enrollment in any licensed early childhood program so that parents and advocates can understand any disparities in access to preschool in their district.

- **Watch out for:** The state plans to omit data on students enrolled in early childhood education programs that are operated outside the district.

### 5) How *often will the state update the data*?

Although districts only have to submit data to the CRDC every other year, states should make sure that all data on school report cards – including CRDC indicators – are updated annually. States should also use consistent definitions from year to year so that parents, advocates, educators and the public can look at this information over time.

- **Watch out for:** The state plans to update their data every other year instead of every year.

### 6) How will the state *display the opportunity to learn data*?

The report card should show how the school compares to the district or how the district compares to the state on these indicators. It should also show how the schools and districts serving high concentrations of students living in poverty and students of color compare to schools and districts serving the fewest of those students, thereby allowing you to see any resource inequities.

- **Watch out for:** Report cards that do not have contextual information about other schools or districts or patterns showing how higher- and lower-need schools or districts compare.

## CRITICAL EQUITY MEASURES REQUIRED BY LAW

*Data marked with an asterisk (\*) must be reported by student group (i.e., for low-income students, students with disabilities, English learners, and students from each major racial/ethnic group).*

### Context

- Important contextual information, including the following:
  - Student demographics\*
  - The number and percentage of students with severe cognitive disabilities who took the alternative assessment
  - The percentage of students who took the statewide annual assessment\*

### Achievement and Accountability

- Student outcomes and school accountability information, including the following:
  - The school's accountability rating (e.g., 1-5 stars)
  - Whether the school has been identified as in-need of improvement (Comprehensive Support and Improvement, Targeted Support and Improvement, or Additional Targeted Support and Improvement)
  - An explanation of how schools got their ratings/ identification status, including
    - The state's n-size\*
    - What indicators the state is using to measure school performance
    - How schools earn credit for those indicators and how much each indicator counts
    - How much results for each group of students count\*
    - What happens if less than 95 percent of students in any group take the statewide annual assessment
  - Data on all of the indicators that are part of the school's rating and identification status, including at minimum:
    - Percentage of students scoring at each level of achievement on state assessments in English language arts, math, and science\*
    - The four-year cohort high school graduation rate (and extended rates, if included)\*
    - The percentage of English learners making progress toward English proficiency
    - Any other indicators that the state includes in its accountability system\*
  - If available, the percentage of high school graduates enrolling in higher education\*

## Measures of Resource Equity and Opportunity to Learn

- *United States Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) Data that must now appear on school report cards (these data are required for students with disabilities, English learners, and students from each major racial/ethnic group, and they should also be reported for students from low-income families):*
  - Rates of:
    - In-school suspensions
    - Out-of-school suspensions
    - Expulsions
    - School-related arrests
    - Referrals to law enforcement
    - Chronic absenteeism (including both excused and unexcused absences)
    - Incidences of violence (including bullying and harassment)
  - The number and percentage of students enrolled in:
    - Preschool programs
    - Advanced coursework to earn postsecondary credit while still in high school (*e.g.*, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses and examinations and dual or concurrent enrollment programs)
  
- Professional qualifications of teachers in the aggregate and disaggregated by high-poverty compared to low-poverty schools, including number and percentage of:
  - Inexperienced teachers, principals, and other school leaders
  - Teachers with emergency or provisional credentials
  - Teachers not teaching in the subject or field for which they are certified or licensed

*Note:* Under a different section of ESSA, the state must also publicly report data showing whether low-income students and students of color are taught by ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers at higher rates than other students. It makes sense to include those data on report cards along with the rest of the teacher data.
  
- Per-pupil expenditures of federal, state, and local funds, disaggregated by source, for each district and school for the preceding fiscal year, including actual salary and non-personnel expenditures, not districtwide average salaries.