

# A Glossary of ESSA Terms



Adapted from the [ESSA Guide for Advocates](#), a publication from The Leadership Conference Education Fund, found at [civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/education/ESSA/ESSA-Guide.pdf](https://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/education/ESSA/ESSA-Guide.pdf)

**This glossary defines terms and jargon used frequently in education policy conversations. It is designed to help education advocates and parents better understand what education policy professionals mean when they use these terms.**

## academic standards

A set of benchmarks for what all students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade level in order to advance to (and be ready for) the next grade level. States are required to have standards in reading/language arts, math, and science. They may also have standards in other subjects including social studies or physical education. *See also: assessment*

## accountability

The policies and procedures states use to set goals for how well all students (and groups of students) should be doing academically, measure and identify how well schools do in meeting those goals, and support and improve schools and districts that are failing to meet the state goals. *See also: state school rating system, indicators, support and improvement plan*

## additional targeted support and improvement schools

In the Every Student Succeeds Act, these are schools that have been identified for additional targeted support and improvement by the state because one or more groups of students in the school are performing at the same level as the lowest performing 5 percent of Title I schools in the state. These schools put together an improvement plan that is approved by the district. *See also: comprehensive support schools, targeted support and improvement schools, support and improvement plan*

## assessment

Another word for “test.” In the federal education policy context, the term “assessment” refers to the one standardized annual test required under federal law in every grade between 3-8 and at least once in high school (grades 9-12). These measure student achievement (what a student knows and can do) and do not measure intelligence (a student’s underlying ability and potential). *See also: indicators*

## chronic absenteeism

This is a measure for how many students miss a significant number of school days—such as 15 days or 10 percent of school days—for any reason, excused or unexcused. This is different from average daily attendance, which is the percent of students in attendance throughout the year.

## comprehensive support and improvement schools

Schools in which a large share of students is not meeting state goals. These include schools in the bottom 5 percent of all Title I schools in the state, schools with graduation rates below 67 percent, and additional targeted support and improvement schools that have not improved. These schools must design and implement a support and improvement plan which is comprehensive and designed to raise achievement for all students in the school. *See also: additional targeted support schools, targeted support and improvement schools, support and improvement plan*



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### disaggregated data

Disaggregated data refers to data that is broken down to see information about different groups of students. Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, data must be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, family income, disability status, English learner status, gender, migrant status, status as a child in foster care, homelessness status, or military connected status. *See also: subgroup*

### English-language proficiency

The ability to speak, listen to, read, and write English accurately and quickly. Students who are learning English as a second language are typically called “English learners” until they master the English language. This is different from proficiency in English/language arts, which is mastering the state’s academic content standards for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and using language. *See also: English learner (EL), academic standards, indicators*

### English learner (EL)

A student between the ages of 3-21 in elementary or secondary school whose native language is a language other than English. Identified English learners are entitled to civil rights protections and accommodations. Title III of ESSA provides funding to support English learners. *See also: English-language proficiency, Title III*

### indicators

Indicators are measures of different aspects of the education system that — taken together — create a picture of a school’s effectiveness at educating all students (e.g. graduation rates, expulsion rates, assessment scores). ESSA requires certain indicators in state accountability system and allows for others. *See also: state school rating system, summative rating, accountability*

### individualized educational program (IEP)

A plan or program developed by a team, including teachers, specialists, and a student’s parent, that is designed to meet the educational needs of a student with a disability who qualifies for specialized instruction. Schools are required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to create IEPs for students with disabilities who qualify for specialized instruction.

### local educational agency (LEA)

The formal name for governmental bodies that are legally sanctioned by the state to administer elementary or secondary schools (e.g. school district, charter school that is also a district) in a community. *See also: SEA*

### n-size

The minimum number of students in a subgroup (e.g. Black students, English learners) that must be present in a school to trigger specific reporting and accountability requirements under federal law. An n-size is necessary to ensure data are not reported on so few students as to make identifiable personal information (e.g. reporting that all Latinx students are advanced in math when there is only one Latinx student means knowing the proficiency of a specific student, which is a violation of that child’s privacy). *See also: subgroup*

### needs assessment

The analysis of the needs of a school that has been identified for support and improvement. This analysis forms the basis of a school’s support and improvement plan. *See also: support and improvement plan*

### participation rate

The percent of students who participated in the state’s statewide annual assessment required under ESSA. The law requires that 95 percent of all students and of each subgroup of students be included in the assessment in order to prevent the exclusion of students who are historically marginalized and to ensure there is sufficient data to understand how whole schools and districts are doing. See *also: assessment*

### state educational agency (SEA)

The formal name for governmental bodies that are legally sanctioned by the state to provide information, resources, and technical assistance to schools, districts, and people in the community served by schools (e.g. state department of education). See *also: LEA*

### state school rating system

The system which combines various indicators to produce a summative rating for a school. These ratings are based on a standard set of criteria identified by the state. The system must also identify schools that are in the bottom 5 percent of all Title I schools, schools that have graduation rates of less than 67 percent, schools that have a subgroup of students who are consistently underperforming, and schools that have a subgroup of students whose performance is so low that it is comparable to the performance of schools in the bottom 5 percent of schools. See *also: summative rating, comprehensive support and improvement schools, targeted support and improvement schools, additional targeted support and improvement schools, support and improvement plan, indicators*

### subgroup

A group of students identified by their race, ethnicity, family income, English proficiency, or disability status (e.g. Black students, White students, students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch). Using data about individual student groups helps to identify the presence of barriers to success based on identity and point toward the need for targeted remedies. See *also: super-subgroup, disaggregated*



### Report Cards

Access to data is an important advocacy tool because it provides the public with information about areas where schools or districts need to improve that they wouldn’t otherwise know. To achieve this end, ESSA requires states and districts to publish annual report cards with information about the state as a whole and all districts and schools within the state. Most of this information must be separated (or “disaggregated”) by student characteristics, including major racial and ethnic groups, family income, disability status, and language status. Some data must also be disaggregated by gender, foster care status, homeless status, military connected status, and migrant status.

#### The data that must be reported includes:

- Details of the state accountability system, including which schools were identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement and Targeted Support and Improvement;
- Results on all accountability indicators (such as student achievement and high school graduation); and
- Opportunity measures (such as Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate/ dual enrollment, suspension and expulsion, chronic absenteeism, educator qualifications, and per-pupil expenditures).

See page 10 of The Leadership Conference Education Fund’s [ESSA Guide for Advocates](#) for more on School Report Cards



### support and improvement plan

The plan a school designs and implements to raise student achievement on either a comprehensive (meaning for all the students in the school) or targeted (meaning for a subgroup of students in a school) basis once the school has been identified. The plan must be informed by an assessment of the needs of the particular school, be developed with stakeholder input (e.g. parents, teachers, and principals) and implement research-based strategies. *See also: state school rating system, comprehensive support and improvement schools, targeted support and improvement schools, additional targeted support and improvement schools*

### targeted support and improvement schools

Schools that are identified through the state school rating system because they have one or more groups of students who are consistently underperforming. These schools must design and implement a targeted support and improvement plan that is approved by the district and is designed to raise achievement for the group(s) of students that is (are) consistently underperforming. *See also: comprehensive support and improvement schools, additional targeted support and improvement schools, subgroup*

### Title I plan / consolidated state plan

A state's plan for complying with the requirements of ESSA. A state has the option of submitting plans separately for each title (e.g. Title I plan, Title III plan) or for submitting a plan which describes what the state intends to do to comply with the requirements of the entire law (consolidated plan). These plans must be developed in consultation with stakeholders, be available for public comment, and be submitted to and approved by the U.S. Department of Education. ESSA includes various requirements for the information included in a state's plan such as specifics of the statewide accountability system. *See also: Title I*

## Components of ESSA

**Title I of ESSA:** The first major chapter of the law, which includes the bulk of funding for school districts and schools and which contains the majority of the law's accountability and reporting requirements. Title I funding is targeted to serve low-income students.

**Title II of ESSA:** This chapter is focused on teacher quality and support for teachers.

**Title III of ESSA:** This chapter provides funding and requirements related to English learners.

**Title IV of ESSA:** This chapter provides funding and requirements for other areas of student support, including extended learning, afterschool programs, supportive school climate, well-rounded education, charter schools, and magnet schools.

**Title V of ESSA:** This chapter provides additional requirements and limitations of the U.S. Secretary of Education, funding for rural schools, and rules governing the combining of federal funding.

**Title VI of ESSA:** This chapter provides funding and requirements related to American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students.

**Title VII of ESSA:** This chapter provides funding and requirements for the Impact Aid program, which compensates districts for lost revenue due to federal lands.

**Title VIII of ESSA:** This chapter includes general requirements which govern the law overall, including which provisions may be waived by the U.S. Department of Education and restrictions on the U.S. Secretary of Education's authority.