

Every Student Succeeds Act Primer: Assessments

December 2015



The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 supports states in implementing high-quality assessments by providing new assessment flexibility, funding, and a new pilot program. These new policies will support teachers in using assessments to foster deeper learning among students, including the ability to master core academic content, think critically and solve complex problems, and communicate effectively.

Annual statewide assessments. ESSA requires states to administer an annual assessment of students in grades three through eight, and once in high school, in math and English/language arts.

New assessment flexibility. ESSA includes several provisions intended to strengthen the quality of state assessments:

- Assessments may be delivered, in part, in the form of projects, portfolios, and extended-performance tasks.
- In high schools, districts may implement nationally recognized assessments that meet state and federal technical standards and are approved by “peer review” and the state.
- States may, but are not required to, set a target limit on the aggregate amount of time spent on assessment administration.

Funding. ESSA maintains federal funding to support state assessments, authorizing up to \$378 million annually. States may use these funds to develop and implement the annual assessments required under the law. In addition, states and districts may use funds to develop balanced assessment systems (i.e., formative, interim, and summative assessments) and competency-based assessments. Furthermore, states may use federal funds to conduct assessment audits of state and district assessments to ensure they are necessary and of high quality.

Innovative assessment pilot. ESSA allows up to seven states, and a consortia not to exceed four states, to implement an innovative assessment and accountability pilot. This pilot may include the use of competency- or performance-based assessments for accountability purposes, and removes the requirement for annual statewide assessments to be used for accountability purposes.

Opt-out. At least 95 percent of students and 95 percent of each group of traditionally underserved students must be assessed. This provision aims to ensure that students will participate in annual statewide assessments.

Policy	No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)	Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Waivers	Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
Requires annual statewide assessments	Yes	Yes	Yes
Includes an innovative assessment pilot	No	Limited (New Hampshire received approval for innovative assessments.)	Yes