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# Leveraging the Every Student Succeeds Act to Support State Visions for College and Career Readiness

States continue to position college and career readiness (CCR) at the center of their educational strategies. Many states have formulated multidimensional definitions of CCR that are supported by key educational inputs including curricula, conditions for learning, accountability systems, and assessments. To operationalize a strong overall CCR vision, the state's CCR definition and these inputs should be closely aligned (see Figure 1). The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) provides additional leverage for these alignment efforts beyond that of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) by more meaningfully incorporating the various academic and nonacademic components of state CCR definitions.

This brief presents a policy framework to support states' efforts to move their CCR visions forward in a cohesive manner. The framework is grouped according to three closely interrelated policy areas under ESSA:

- Provision of a **well-rounded education** that emphasizes readiness beyond NCLB's focus on core academic content via enriched, accelerated curricula and educational experiences and improved conditions for learning
- Augmentation of **accountability systems to include multiple measures** that may form a continuum of usable academic and nonacademic measures of readiness from preschool to the workforce

**State definitions of CCR** include the following skills, knowledge, and dispositions. ESSA meaningfully incorporates many of these academic and nonacademic student outcomes:

- Academic knowledge (19 states' definitions)
- Critical thinking and/or problem-solving skills such as analysis, inference, and evaluation (14 states)
- Social and emotional traits such as collaboration, social awareness, and responsible decision-making (14 states)
- Intrapersonal skills such as grit, resilience, and perseverance (8 states)
- Citizenship and/or community involvement (8 states)
- Other employability skills (6 states)

### Delaware's CCR definition exemplifies states' multidimensional approach to CCR:

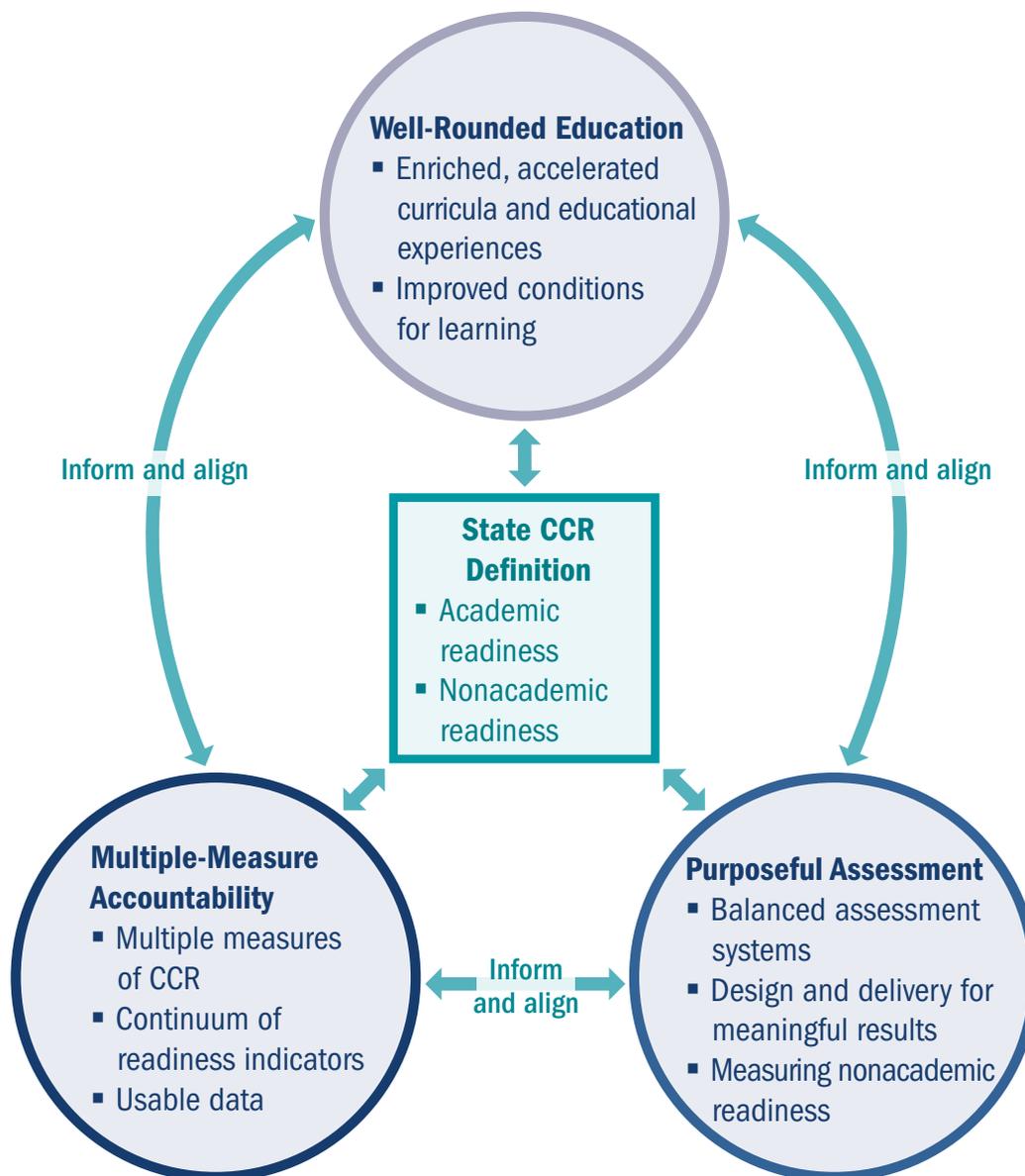
"Each Delaware student will graduate college- and career-ready. Students will be prepared to successfully plan and pursue an education and career path aligned to their personal goals, with the ability to adapt and to innovate as job demands change. Students will graduate with strong academic knowledge, the behaviors and skills with which to apply their knowledge, and the ability to collaborate and communicate effectively. Each student should be an independent learner, and have respect for a diverse society and a commitment to responsible citizenship."

Source: Mishkind, 2014

- Design and delivery of **purposeful assessment systems** that are balanced across summative, interim, and formative tests and yield more meaningful results by considering student background, ability level, and how mastery can be demonstrated

This brief will also introduce some of the key federal requirements and opportunities under this policy framework for supporting state CCR visions, with a focus on provisions under Titles I, II, and IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as amended by ESSA.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 1. State Vision for College and Career Readiness as Expressed by State CCR Definition and Aligned Policies Under ESSA.**



<sup>1</sup> **Title I** of ESSA (“Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged”) focuses on providing all children with the opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education and on closing achieving gaps. **Title II** of ESSA focuses on “preparing, training and recruiting high-quality teachers, principals and other school leaders.” **Title IV** of ESSA (“21st Century Schools”) focuses on offering content-rich programming and support to students within and beyond the regular school day.

## Well-Rounded Education

The provision of a “well-rounded education” is a focal point of ESSA and a significant shift from NCLB, which emphasized academic readiness in mathematics, reading or English language arts (ELA), and science (see Appendix A for other key CCR-related shifts from NCLB). ESSA supports academic and nonacademic components of states’ CCR definitions via two key inputs to a well-rounded education: (1) enriched, accelerated curricula and educational experiences; and (2) improved conditions for learning.

### **Enriched, Accelerated Curricula and Educational Experiences.**

Broad curricula, in addition to their inherent enriching value, have been shown in some research and evaluations to positively impact students’ abilities in mathematics and reading or ELA (Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles, 1999; Ludwig & Song, 2015; Schellenberg, 2004). ESSA gives states a mandate to ensure that students are provided an enriched, accelerated curriculum beyond courses targeted by required state assessments (e.g., mathematics, reading or ELA, and science) and that is aligned with postsecondary experiences. Title I requires that local educational agency (LEA) and schoolwide plans describe how they will support a well-rounded education using basic program funding and other opportunities provided under Titles I, II, and IV, such as the use of “Direct Student Services” funds to expand participation in courses not otherwise available at a student’s school, including career and technical education (CTE) and accelerated coursework (ESSA, Section 1003A; note that all subsequent sectional references refer to specific sections of ESSA).

*Aligned “Challenging Academic Standards.”* Despite increasing graduation rates and college matriculation rates nationally, rates of college perseverance and completion continue to fall, especially among minority and disadvantaged students (Harvill et al., 2012). ESSA includes new requirements to ensure that mastery of academic standards is meaningful for all students, stipulating that “challenging academic standards” in mathematics, reading or ELA, and science are aligned with:

- Postsecondary entrance requirements for nonremedial core coursework at the state’s public institutions for higher education
- State-established career and technical education requirements

By strengthening the connections between P–12 education, postsecondary education, and workforce placement, ESSA increases students’ opportunities to pursue multiple pathways to CCR.

*Nonacademic Readiness.* Research and employers continue to stress the importance of nonacademic readiness for learning and future employability (Dymnicki, Sambolt, & Kidron, 2013; National Network of Business and Industry Associations, 2014). While ESSA does not explicitly include nonacademic readiness in a well-rounded education, states and LEAs have a significant

### **A well-rounded education**

under ESSA may consist of courses, programming, and activities beyond core content or of advanced rigor, such as:

- Technology and digital literacy
- Foreign languages
- Civics, government, and geography
- Economics
- Computer science and engineering
- Music and other arts (dance, theater, visual arts)
- Health, nutrition, and physical education
- Financial literacy
- Environmental education
- Career and technical education
- Accelerated coursework (Advanced Placement, dual/concurrent enrollment, etc.)
- Career pathways counseling
- Programs that promote volunteerism and community involvement

opportunity to include nonacademic learning goals in their own definitions of a "well-rounded education" (ESSA only *suggests* content for a well-rounded education; it does not *prescribe* it). Such learning goals should be aligned with other policies such as CCR definitions and graduation requirements. At least 12 states, for example, require or allow students to attain credits in family and life skills, communication skills, career pathways knowledge, and/or community service in order to graduate (Education Commission of the States, 2016). States may promote the attainment of nonacademic traits through various new opportunities, such as the use of Title II funds to train educators to help all students develop the "skills essential for learning readiness and academic success" (Section 2103).

**Improved Conditions for Learning.** ESSA also supports nonacademic readiness goals inherent in a well-rounded education through provisions for the improvement of conditions for student learning that support social-emotional learning, intrapersonal skills, and other employability skills.<sup>2</sup> While NCLB addressed nonacademic readiness primarily by promoting safe and drug-free schools, ESSA greatly expands the scope of controllable conditions that impact student readiness. State-, district-, and school-level Title I plans must address various conditions for learning (Section 1111), and multiple support opportunities are otherwise provided under Titles II and IV, including "Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants" (Sections 4101–4121) and funds to establish "pipeline services" in "Promise Neighborhoods" and "Full-Service Community Schools" (Sections 4624–4625).

**Conditions for student learning** to support academic and nonacademic readiness to learn under ESSA include:

- Drug and violence prevention activities
- School-based mental health services
- Nutritional education and physical education programs
- Bullying and harassment prevention
- Dropout counseling and prevention programs
- Integrated systems of family and student support
- Training on conflict resolution techniques
- Sexual abuse and awareness and prevention programs
- Schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports

## Multiple-Measure Accountability

ESSA's accountability framework includes three important principles for supporting student progress toward and beyond CCR:

- The inclusion of **multiple measures** of college and career readiness, including the opportunity to use nonacademic measures of readiness
- The opportunity to use a **continuum of readiness indicators** to ensure that students meet key milestones along the preschool-to-workforce trajectory
- The integration of **usable data**, including measures and data formats that better inform educators how much progress individual students must make to attain and go beyond CCR

These principles are embedded in accountability requirements to annually differentiate among all public schools across multiple performance and/or quality indicators, identify low-performing schools, publicly report on the quality of schools, and support LEAs and schools in continuous improvement efforts using evidence-based strategies.

<sup>2</sup> ESSA distinguishes between a well-rounded education and conditions for learning (CFLs); however, policymakers should consider how an enriched, accelerated curriculum and CFLs work together to impact student readiness. ESSA supports this approach by requiring that Title I Basic Program grants and various Title IV grants target both of these educational inputs.

**Multiple Measures of CCR.** Just as state definitions can acknowledge the multidimensional quality of CCR at the student level, multiple-measure accountability systems under ESSA reflect this characteristic at the school level. Accountability using multiple, diverse measures of school performance and quality provides more meaningful and useful results for educators, parents, and students (Chester, 2005; Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit, & Pittenger, 2014; Linn, 2006). While schools under NCLB were rated based on proficiency and graduation rate or another academic indicator,<sup>3</sup> ESSA requires states to annually differentiate all public schools on the basis of at least four indicators:

1. **Percentage of students proficient** in mathematics and reading or ELA on statewide tests
2. **Four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate**, with the option to also measure the five-year rate (high schools), or **Achievement Growth** from year-to-year (on statewide assessment results) or another academic indicator (elementary and middle schools)
3. **Percentage of students making progress toward English language proficiency**<sup>4</sup> (ELP)
4. An additional indicator of **school quality or student success**

**Continuum of Readiness Indicators.** ESSA gives states the opportunity to use key readiness indicators along the educational P–20 trajectory for accountability rather than focusing on culminating measures such as high school graduation. Systems of accountability that scaffold key educational milestones can trigger critical early supports and interventions to keep students on track to CCR.

## Identifying Low-Performing Schools

States must identify low-performing schools for the following levels of support based on their performance across multiple measures:

**Targeted support.** Title I schools with one or more subgroups that are consistently underperforming across one or more of the required accountability indicators.

**Additional Targeted Support.** Title I schools with one or more subgroups that perform at the same level as the schools in the bottom 5 percent of performance across all measures (e.g., as measured by applying a performance index to the subgroup).

### Comprehensive Support.

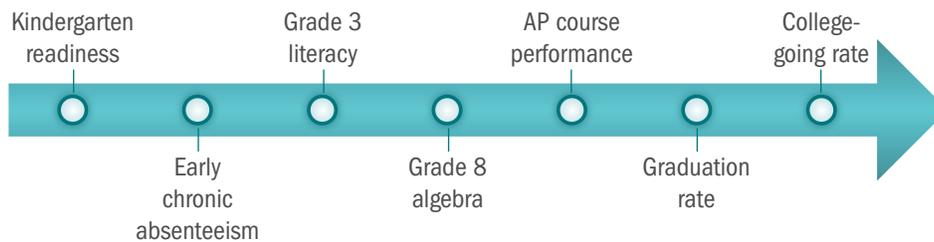
- Title I schools performing in the bottom 5 percent of schools across all indicators
- All schools with graduation rates less than 67 percent
- “Additional targeted” schools that fail to exit improvement status after a state-determined number of years

<sup>3</sup> Schools under NCLB were determined to be meeting adequate yearly progress—or failing to do so—based upon student proficiency in mathematics and reading or ELA and graduation rates (for high schools) or another academic indicator (for elementary and middle schools). Most states used daily attendance rates for the other academic indicator (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> ELP progress under ESSA is calculated in a manner similar to the “Progress” Annual Measurable Achievement Objective (i.e., AMAO 1) under Title III of NCLB, with the explicit exception that the former may take into consideration student characteristics such as time in language instruction, grade level, age, native language proficiency, etc.

## CCR Accountability Indicators Within a Continuum of Readiness

Each state has the opportunity to select at least one indicator of school quality or student success for its accountability system that better supports its CCR definition. This indicator might complement other measures within a continuum of research-based readiness indicators. States might choose a nonacademic indicator that is a key predictor of future readiness (e.g., chronic absenteeism) or an academic measure that directly supports the transition to college or career (e.g., advanced placement or CTE course participation and performance). Indicators must be valid, reliable, comparable across schools, statewide, and disaggregated by subgroup. States might consider the following research-based indicators of future readiness, some of which are already used by states (Hein, Smerdon, & Sambolt, 2013).



**Usable Data.** ESSA also supports a shift to accountability systems that yield data that can be more readily used by educators and parents at the local level to track progress toward CCR and to make meaningful adjustments to educational inputs. Requirements to provide educators with more user-friendly and actionable data include:

- Use of student progress measures such as achievement growth and progress toward ELP<sup>5</sup>
- Incorporation of student data disaggregated by individual student subgroups, including by homeless status, foster care status, and status as a child of a member of the armed forces, allowing educators to more readily identify struggling students<sup>6</sup>
- Cross-tabulation of student subgroup data to indicate, for example, the number of English learners who also have disabilities, allowing educators to better consider the complex backgrounds of their students in their instructional approaches

## Purposeful Assessment

As the role of accountability systems under ESSA has become more formative, so too has the purpose of assessments. ESSA introduces supports for balanced assessment systems that place increased emphasis on generating meaningful results throughout the school year to track progress toward and beyond CCR.

<sup>5</sup> This marks a shift from NCLB requirements that focused on snapshot measures such as proficiency and graduation rate.

<sup>6</sup> This requirement contrasts with states' flexibility under the waivers from particular requirements of NCLB (ESEA Flexibility) to use combined subgroups (i.e., super-subgroups).

**Balanced Assessment Systems.** While ESSA retains NCLB’s foundational state testing requirements,<sup>7</sup> it also encourages assessments that generate interim and formative performance results for tracking students’ progress toward and beyond CCR. To encourage balanced assessment strategies,<sup>8</sup> ESSA provides opportunities for states and LEAs to:

- Develop and provide training for “balanced assessment systems that include summative, interim, and formative assessments” (Section 1201)
- Conduct assessment audits that must include descriptions of the intended and actual purposes of assessments (Section 1202)
- Place limits on the aggregate amount of time spent on test administration (Section 1111)
- Aggregate a series of interim test results into a single summative state test result (Section 1111)

**Assessment Design and Delivery for Meaningful Results.** It is important to accurately determine where students are on the continuum of readiness in order to understand how far they must go to achieve CCR and beyond. Assessment systems under ESSA may generate more meaningful results than did NCLB by better accounting for students’ backgrounds, ability levels, and how mastery is demonstrated.

*Student Background.* Technical assessment requirements have been augmented to better account for student background, including requirements to integrate, to the extent practicable, universal design for learning principles and to use culturally neutral items with regard to beliefs and attitudes. ESSA also retains the NCLB requirement to test 95 percent of all students and of all disaggregated subgroups.

*Ability Level and Demonstration of Mastery.* ESSA supports performance-based, personalized, and competency-based approaches to assessment that better account for students’ ability levels and how they best demonstrate mastery of academic standards. In addition, summative state test results under ESSA must indicate whether or not students are performing at grade level. By establishing more contextualized or sensitive measures of performance against academic standards for all students, student progress toward CCR can be more meaningfully tracked.

## ESSA’s Technical State Assessment Requirements

ESSA adds new technical requirements for state assessments that consider students’ backgrounds and ability levels (indicated by an asterisk [\*] below) in conjunction with other important requirements retained from NCLB. Under ESSA, states must ensure that statewide assessments:

- Are aligned with challenging state standards
- Are valid and reliable
- Measure students’ higher-order thinking skills and understanding
- Include accommodations for English learners and students with disabilities
- Do not evaluate or assess students’ personal or family beliefs and attitudes\*
- Embed, to the extent practicable, principles of universal design for learning\*
- Provide information about whether the student is performing at grade level\*

<sup>7</sup> States must continue to administer summative assessments in mathematics and reading or ELA annually in Grades 3–8 and once in high school, and in science once in each of the 3–5, 6–9 and 10–12 grade spans.

<sup>8</sup> Stakeholder recognition of high average test administration and preparation times (e.g., on average, students in the nation’s largest urban school districts take eight standardized tests per year [Hart et al., 2015]) has led to renewed interest in ensuring that assessments are purposefully deployed.

## Design and Delivery of Required Statewide Assessments under ESSA to More Meaningfully Track Progress Towards CCR

- States may administer statewide assessments partially in the form of projects, portfolios, and extended-performance tasks.
- States may leverage new funding for competency-based assessment and personalized and blended learning including through the Innovative Assessment System competitive pilot program (Section 1204).
- States retain the right to use computer-adaptive testing, which captures student results well above or well below grade level more accurately than fixed-format tests.
- Districts may use state-approved college matriculation tests (e.g., SAT, ACT), which have higher achievement ceilings for advanced students, as statewide tests.
- States may administer high school-level state mathematics tests to high-achieving eighth graders if these students will receive increasingly advanced mathematics tests when they reach high school (e.g., using Algebra I and Algebra II end-of-course tests as statewide tests).

*(Section 1111 unless otherwise noted)*

**Measuring Nonacademic Readiness.** Aligning assessment and evaluation to support the nonacademic component(s) of a state's CCR vision is a challenge for which a long-term plan might be developed. Before formal adoption or scaling of nonacademic readiness measures for high-stakes purposes, there is a need to carefully select, collect, and validate these measures. States have the opportunity to learn from and monitor ongoing efforts to use student survey data for accountability purposes (e.g., California Department of Education, 2016). ESSA allows flexibility in how nonacademic readiness is assessed and integrated into overall state strategies, as it does not contain direct provisions concerning these types of measures.

## Conclusion: State Vision for Leveraging ESSA to Support CCR

ESSA provides leverage for states to align policies regarding key educational inputs and rich definitions of CCR. The requirements and opportunities regarding a well-rounded education, multiple-measure accountability, and purposeful assessment, embedded throughout Titles I, II, and IV, interact and inform one another to support students' progress toward the academic and nonacademic readiness outcomes included in many states' CCR definitions. The core of any coherent state vision for CCR should be the alignment of the state's CCR definition and these key policy areas.

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## Appendix. Comparison of NCLB, ESEA Flexibility, and ESSA Requirements That Support State Visions for College and Career Readiness, by Policy Area

Policy Area	NCLB Requirements	ESEA Flexibility Requirements	ESSA Requirements
Educational content	Focused on mathematics, reading or ELA, science, social studies	Retains NCLB requirements	Requires a “well-rounded program of instruction” for students at the LEA level that broadens the scope of students’ academic readiness and may include nonacademic readiness
Academic standards for reading or ELA, mathematics, and science	States required to adopt “challenging academic standards”	States must adopt “college and career ready standards” that align with entrance requirements for credit-bearing college coursework	States must adopt “challenging academic standards” that align with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Entrance requirements for credit-bearing college coursework</li> <li>Applicable CTE standards</li> </ul>
Conditions for student learning	Focused on “safe and drug-free schools”	For low-performing schools, prescribed improvements to school safety and discipline and “other nonacademic factors” that impact student achievement, such as students’ social, emotional, and health needs	State and LEA plans under Title I must address the improvement of broader “conditions for learning”; otherwise acknowledges the roles of teachers and leaders in supporting improved conditions for learning
School accountability framework	States required to identify low-performing schools based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Performance against proficiency targets</li> <li>Performance against graduation rate or other academic indicator</li> </ul>	States must identify low-performing Title I schools based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proficiency (or, for subgroups, achievement gaps)</li> <li>Graduation rate</li> </ul> Other indicators, including growth and CCR, are allowed	States must identify low-performing Title I/ non-Title schools using multiple measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proficiency</li> <li>Graduation rate (high school) or growth or other academic indicator (elementary/ middle)</li> <li>Progress toward ELP</li> <li>Additional indicator of school quality or student success (may include CCR)</li> </ul>
CCR-related reporting requirements	States <i>may</i> report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attendance</li> <li>Incidents of school violence, drug and alcohol abuse, suspensions, and expulsions</li> <li>AP course/test participation and performance</li> </ul>	States must report on college-bound and college credit-accumulation rates for all students and student subgroups	States must report on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chronic absenteeism</li> <li>Rates of suspension, expulsion, arrests, violence, bullying</li> <li>AP/IB, dual or concurrent enrollment programs and test participation</li> <li>Early education participation</li> <li>College-bound rates as available</li> <li>CTE attainment (optional)</li> </ul> Results must cross-tabulate racial/ethnic groups across other student characteristics

Policy Area	NCLB Requirements	ESEA Flexibility Requirements	ESSA Requirements
Technical requirements of assessments	Statewide assessments must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Align with standards</li> <li>Be valid and reliable</li> <li>Test higher-order thinking</li> <li>Provide appropriate accommodations for English language learners and students with disabilities</li> </ul>	Retains NCLB requirements	Retains NCLB requirements and also requires that statewide assessments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Embed universal design for learning principles to the extent practicable</li> <li>Do not evaluate beliefs and attitudes</li> <li>Provide information about whether or not students are performing at grade level</li> <li>Enable disaggregation for additional subgroups</li> </ul>
Interim and formative assessments	States may apply for competitive funds to develop assessments that “chart student progress over time”	Retains NCLB requirements	States may apply for competitive funds to develop balanced assessment systems that include summative, as well as interim and formative tests
Assessment formats	States may apply for waivers to use statewide assessments in alternative formats	Retains NCLB requirements	States may use funds to develop statewide assessments in alternative formats, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partial use of projects, portfolios, and performance tasks in statewide assessments</li> <li>Interim assessments</li> <li>Computer-adaptive assessments</li> <li>Competency-based assessments</li> </ul>

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