

A blurred background of a classroom with rows of wooden desks and chairs. The text is overlaid on this background.

EXECUTIVE

SUMMARY

ESSA Report Card: Few States Make the Grade

What is ESSA and why is it important?

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is the K–12 education law that replaced No Child Left Behind. ESSA shifts power from the federal government and gives states more control in shaping their education systems.

ESSA provides each state with a fresh start toward improving educational outcomes for students, including those with disabilities such as learning and attention issues.

The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) and its Expert Advisory Council reviewed each state’s plan to implement ESSA in order to better understand the degree to which states are addressing the needs of students with disabilities.

The results of the study are troubling.

- Groups of students, including students with disabilities, low-income students and students learning English, are **frequently neglected**.
- **More transparency is needed** from states about how their plans will serve all students and specific groups of students.
- While some states have strong plans to use ESSA to help meet the needs of students with disabilities, far too many states are **squandering this opportunity**.

The bottom line: **Most states need to do more.**

APPROACH

With guidance from its Expert Advisory Council, NCLD examined 15 specific components of the ESSA plan for each state, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. These components affect many students, but this analysis focuses on students with disabilities. NCLD then rated each state's plan across the 15 indicators and developed a rating system for each key area:

1. **Accountability:** Do state accountability systems under ESSA include students with disabilities in meaningful ways?
2. **Support:** Are support systems for struggling schools aligned to meet the needs of students with disabilities?
3. **Inclusiveness:** Did states meaningfully include students with disabilities throughout their ESSA plans, and coordinate effectively with ongoing efforts under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)?



The ratings system is color-coded as follows:

- **Green:** With 75 percent or more of possible points, the plan, policies or systems support students with disabilities in meaningful ways.
- **Yellow:** With 50–74 percent of possible points, the plan, policies or systems only partially support students with disabilities.
- **Red:** With 49 percent or fewer of possible points, the plan, policies or systems do not meaningfully support students with disabilities.

WHAT WE FOUND

Accountability

Forty-six states should do more to develop inclusive accountability policies.

- Only 18 states have identical long-term goals for students with disabilities and students without disabilities.
- Thirty-three states do not include the academic performance of specific groups of students in their school rating systems.

Support

- Seventeen states lack well-designed plans to address bullying and discipline issues.
- Only 10 states have detailed descriptions of interventions that will support students with disabilities.

Inclusiveness

- Forty-two states have not done enough to fully address the needs of students with disabilities throughout their programs and planning.
- Half of all states did not include a description of how ESSA and IDEA goals are aligned.

What's Next: Putting Ideas Into Action

We urge policymakers to take action and...

- Incorporate students with disabilities in state plans and hold schools accountable for helping all students succeed.
- Further define how your state or district will use ESSA resources to support students with disabilities.
- Engage stakeholders, including parents of students with disabilities, while moving forward in the implementation process.

