

LEARN THE LAW

Every Student Succeeds Act

The **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)** of 1965 is the primary education law in the United States for students from kindergarten through 12th grade. It was updated in 2015 and is now called the **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)**, replacing the **No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)** that was in effect from 2002 to 2015. This law allocates federal funds to states and school districts through specific programs outlined in the legislation.

The main goal of ESSA is to ensure that public schools provide a good education and are accountable for student learning and success. ESSA also includes initiatives to improve the quality of teachers and school leaders, promote evidence-based educational methods, offer more educational options, and address the needs of specific student groups, like those in poverty and English learners.



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Why It Matters

ESEA, primarily Title I, has essential rules to make sure that students with disabilities, including those with learning disabilities, are part of the plans to make education better.

ESSA lets states make their own plans for accountability. Even though test scores are still important, they're not the only way to judge how well a school is doing. States can choose other measures, like student involvement or college and career readiness. States have to share this information in a clear way, and each state has a public "Report Card" with this information.

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Some essential parts of ESSA about the education of students with learning disabilities include the following:



Academic Standards

To get funds from Title I, each state has to set rigorous standards for what students should learn in math, reading or language arts, and science. **These standards must be the same for all students**, except those with the most significant cognitive disabilities who might have alternative standards aligned to an alternate diploma. In simplest terms, states cannot set lower standards just for students with disabilities.



Accountability Systems

A state has to set goals every three years in its “ESSA plan” to improve student learning and increase the high school graduation rate. These goals must consider the improvements needed to close the gaps in achievement and graduation rates among different groups of students. The state also needs to have “interim measures of progress” to show how it’s moving towards these long-term goals.

The state is responsible for creating and using a system to make sure schools are making progress. This includes looking at how well students do on state tests, their academic growth (especially in elementary and middle schools), high school graduation rates, English learners’ ability to become proficient in English, and other school quality and student success measures. This applies to all students and specific subgroups, including students with disabilities.



Statewide Summative Assessments

A state has to give all students, except a very small group with significant cognitive disabilities—usually no more than 1 percent of all students in the state who take an alternate assessment—the same standards-aligned assessments in math and reading/language arts from grades 3 to 8, and at least once in high school. Students also must take science assessments at three grade levels. The student’s IEP team makes the decision to exempt students from these tests.

The testing systems used must be able to show the results for different groups of students, including those with disabilities.



School Improvement

If the state’s system identifies a school as having certain groups of students (like those with disabilities) who are not doing as well as they should, the school has to create a plan to help those students do better. This plan must include using strategies that are proven to work.

If the school follows this plan but doesn’t see improvement over time according to the state’s standards, **it has to take extra steps decided by the state to make sure those specific groups of students start doing better.**

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Data and Reporting

The law says each state must create and share a report card yearly, as do the local education agencies (LEAs)—typically school districts and individual schools. These report cards must include:

1. State Goals and Progress Measures

The state's long-term goals and their progress are assessed for all students and specific groups, including those with disabilities, those with various racial and ethnic backgrounds, English learners, and other similar groups

2. Student Achievement Information

How well students are doing on the state tests, with details for each group

3. Other Academic Measures for Elementary and Middle Schools

Details about how students do beyond test scores, including specific information for each group, such as student attendance

4. High School Graduation Rate

How many students graduate from high school, with details for each group

5. School Quality and Student Success Indicators

Details about how schools perform in areas that indicate school quality or student success, including specific information for each group



21st Century Schools

ESSA Title IV gives money for two main grant programs and other initiatives to meet various student needs and update schools. These include:

• Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (Title IV, Part A)

Funding for providing a well-rounded education, making schools safer, and improving technology and digital skills

• 21st Century Community Learning Centers

Funding for community centers and after-school programs

• Federal Charter School Program

Funding to support the creation and improvement of charter schools

• Magnet School Assistance

Funding for magnet schools

• Statewide Family Engagement Centers

Funding for centers that involve families in education at a statewide level

• Other Discretionary Grant Programs, Including Research Grants

Additional grant programs, including those for research purposes



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High-Quality Teachers

The second largest program, Title II, **gives support to states and school districts for activities to improve teaching and school leadership.** The law even states that LEAs can use the funds to create programs and activities that help teachers more effectively serve children with disabilities.



Title I Schoolwide Programs: Leveling the Playing Field

If a school has many students from low-income families, they can use Title I funds to enhance the entire school. **The plan aims to improve the performance of all students, with particular attention to various groups, including those with disabilities.** Some Title I schools, however, concentrate on specific students at a higher risk of not meeting state standards. The law also emphasizes the importance of parent and family involvement.

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Additional Resources

[Congressional Research Service: Elementary and Secondary Education Act \(ESEA\), as Reauthorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\): A Primer](#)