

NEW HAMPSHIRE



New Hampshire's accountability system emphasizes growth, but by prioritizing progress for traditionally low-performing subgroups, it may be giving an incentive to ignore their high-achieving students.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS ANALYSIS

The Every Student Succeeds Act grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than its predecessor, No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Consequently, states now have an opportunity to design school rating systems that improve upon the NCLB model, especially when it comes to high achievers.

NCLB meant well (as did many state accountability systems that preceded it), but it had a pernicious flaw. Namely, it created strong incentives for schools to focus all their energy on helping low-performing students get over a modest “proficiency” bar, while ignoring the educational needs of their high achievers, who were likely to pass state reading and math tests regardless of what happened in the classroom. This may be why the United States has seen significant achievement growth for its lowest-performing students over the last twenty years but smaller gains for its top students.

Starting in 2011, former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan offered waivers to states that wanted the flexibility to redesign their accountability systems. In particular, states were allowed to incorporate the use of real student growth measures into their school determinations. This was important for a variety of reasons. First, growth measures more accurately evaluate schools' impact on student achievement than proficiency rates, which are strongly correlated with student demographics, family circumstance, and prior achievement. But just as significantly, well-designed growth measures can eliminate the temptation for schools to ignore their high achievers.

ESSA maintains NCLB's requirement that states assess students annually in grades 3–8 and once in high school, as well as the mandate that states adopt accountability systems that lead to ratings for schools. These systems must include four types of indicators: academic achievement; another academic indicator, which can include student growth for elementary and middle schools; growth towards English proficiency for English language learners; and at least one other valid, reliable indicator of school quality or student success. Each of the academic indicators (1–3) must carry “substantial” weight and, in the aggregate, must count “much more” than the fourth.

Here we examine whether New Hampshire's accountability system prioritizes high achievers. We specifically evaluate the state's system for rating school performance during the 2013-2014 school year—the most recent year for which information is available. We do not examine the quality of New Hampshire's standards, tests, or sanctions for low performance.

This analysis also illustrates how states can seize the opportunity under ESSA to redesign their accountability systems and prioritize high achievers.

This last point is especially important because many state accountability systems are currently in flux. In part, that's because of recent changes allowed by ESEA waivers, as well as the coming changes driven by ESSA implementation. But it's also because states across the country recently moved to new, tougher assessments linked to their new, tougher standards.

States may think we're being premature in evaluating their systems during this time of massive change. Please understand that our primary objective is to identify the design features of an accountability system that works for all students—which we hope will become the prevailing model now that ESEA is reauthorized and states' testing regimes are becoming stable once again.

Our focus here is on rating systems for elementary and middle schools. A separate analysis will examine the same issues for high school accountability.

HOW STATES CAN PRIORITIZE HIGH ACHIEVERS IN THEIR SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

In our view, states can and should take four steps to ensure that the needs of high achievers are prioritized under ESSA:

1. **For the first academic indicator required by ESSA (“academic achievement”), give schools incentives for getting more students to an “advanced” level.** Under ESSA, states will continue to track the percentage of students who attain proficiency on state tests. They should also give schools incentives for getting students to an advanced level (such as level four on Smarter Balanced or level five on PARCC). For example, they might create an achievement index that gives schools partial credit for getting students to “basic,” full credit for getting students to “proficient,” and additional credit for getting students to “advanced.” (It's not entirely clear from the Department of Education's proposed regulations whether this will be allowed, though we don't see anything in the law prohibiting it.)
2. **For the second academic indicator expected by ESSA (student growth), rate schools using a “true growth model,” i.e., one that looks at the progress of individual students at all achievement levels and not just those who are low-performing or below the “proficient” line.** Regrettably, some states still don't consider individual student growth, or else they use a “growth-to-proficiency system” that continues to encourage schools to ignore the needs of students above (or far above) the proficient level. Using true growth models—such as “value added” or the “growth percentile method”—for all students is much preferred.

3. **Include “gifted students” (or “high achieving students”) as a subgroup in the state’s accountability system and report results for them separately.** States can signal that high achievers matter by making them a visible, trackable “subgroup,” akin to special education students or English language learners, and publishing school ratings for their progress and/or achievement. (Obviously, it makes little sense to simply report that high achievers are high-achieving. But whether they are making strong growth is quite relevant. Alternatively, states might publish results for students labeled as “gifted,” though that opens up a can of worms about how that label is applied.)

4. **When determining summative school ratings, make growth—across the achievement spectrum—count the most.** Finally, the Department of Education’s proposed regulations require states to combine multiple factors into summative school ratings, probably through an index. Each of the three academic indicators (achievement, growth, and progress toward English proficiency) must carry “substantial” weight. But in our view, states should (and, under ESSA, are free to) make growth matter the most (50 percent or more of a school’s total score). Otherwise, schools will continue to face an incentive to ignore their high-performers. (States that don’t combine their indicators into a summative school rating receive a “Not Applicable” here.)

DOES NEW HAMPSHIRE’S ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM PRIORITIZE HIGH ACHIEVERS?





INDICATOR	RATINGS	NOTES
1. Does the state rate schools’ “academic achievement” using a model that gives additional credit for students achieving at an “advanced” level?		New Hampshire does not give additional credit for students achieving at an “advanced” level. ¹
2. Does the state rate schools’ growth using a model that looks at the progress of all individual students, not just those below the “proficient” line?		New Hampshire uses a student growth percentile model. ² A student growth percentile model compares students to peers with similar achievement in the previous school year by ranking them based on their year-to-year growth.
3. Does the state’s accountability system include “gifted students,” “high-achieving students,” or the like as a subgroup and report their results separately?		New Hampshire does not include “gifted students,” “high-achieving students,” or the like as a subgroup or report their results separately. (See Exhibit A.)
4. When calculating summative school ratings, does “growth for all students” count for at least half of the rating?		Growth counts for 60 percent of a school’s summative rating, but “growth for all students” counts for just 12 percent. ³ (See Exhibit A.)

EXHIBIT A⁴

Select School Year: 2013 Select a District: 141 - Dover View Report

Enter a School: 20435 - Dover Middle School

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2013 - 2014
 NEW HAMPSHIRE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS REPORT
 DOVER MIDDLE SCHOOL (20435) IN DOVER

SCHOOL PROFILE: Enrollment: 1089 Grades : 5 to 8 ELL (English Learners): 4% SWD (Students with Disabilities): 0% Low SES: 32%

READING:	N	Med. Target SGP	Med. Actual SGP	Met Target ?	% Met AMAO Target	Points Earned	TOTAL
Whole School (all SGP groups)	773	11	59	Y		4	
EL - AMAO1	4						
EL - SGP	20	39	77	Y		4	
SWD - SGP	105	85	44	N		2	
Low SES - SGP	185	12	58	Y		4	
All Others - SGP	483	8	83	Y		4	
READING AVERAGE POINTS						3.6	
WEIGHTING = TIMES 3							10.8
MATHEMATICS:	N	Med. Target SGP	Med. Actual SGP	Met Target?		Points Earned	TOTAL
Whole School (all SGP groups)	773	26	53	Y		3	
EL - SGP	20	58	81	Y		4	
SWD - SGP	105	93	40	N		2	
Low SES - SGP	185	35	50	Y		3	
All Others - SGP	483	13	55	Y		3	
MATHEMATICS AVERAGE POINTS						3.0	
WEIGHTING = TIMES 3							9.0
SCIENCE:	N	Index Score	Points Earned	TOTAL			
Whole School (all Index groups)	243	81	3				
EL - Index	2						
SWD - Index	33	82	1				
Low SES - Index	53	75	2				
All Others - Index	155	87	3				
SCIENCE AVERAGE POINTS				2.3			
WEIGHTING = TIMES 1				2.3			

PARTICIPATION (IN NECAP AND ACCESS FOR ELLS)	N	Participation Rate	Points Earned	TOTAL
Math Whole School	1,110	100	4	
Math ELLs	41	100	4	
Math SWD	145	100	4	
Math Low SES	234	100	4	
Math: All others	690	100	4	
Reading Whole School	1,110	100	4	
Reading ELLs	41	100	4	
Reading SWD	145	100	4	
Reading Low SES	234	100	4	
Reading: All Others	690	100	4	
Reading - ACCESS	25	100	4	
PARTICIPATION AVERAGE POINTS				4.0
WEIGHTING = TIMES 1				4.0
EXCESSIVE ABSENCE: Percent of students absent more than 10% of enrolled time	N	Excessive Absence Rate	Points Earned	TOTAL
Whole School	1,099	9	3	
ELs	48	2	4	
SWD	160	21	1	
Low SES	235	18	2	
All Others	656	4	4	
EXCESSIVE ABSENCE AVERAGE POINTS				2.8
WEIGHTING = TIMES 1				2.8
DOVER MIDDLE SCHOOL SCHOOL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS TOTAL				32.1
Score for Adequacy Decision:			Total/10.0	3.2

ENDNOTES

1. “Performance Indicators Report – Elementary/Middle Schools,” New Hampshire Department of Education, accessed May 5, 2016, http://www.education.nh.gov/instruction/school_improve/documents/2011-2012-rubric-descrip-elem-ms.pdf.
2. “Implementation of Student Growth Model,” New Hampshire Department of Education, accessed May 5, 2016, <http://education.nh.gov/growth/documents/gaa-overview.pdf>.
3. “2014 Adequacy Report,” New Hampshire Department of Education, pages 5–8, accessed May 5, 2016, http://education.nh.gov/instruction/school_improve/documents/adequacy-report14.pdf.
4. “2013–2014 NH Performance Indicator Report Dover Middle School,” New Hampshire Department of Education, accessed May 5, 2016, <https://my.doe.nh.gov/profiles/accountability/performanceindicatorreport.aspx?year=2014&d=709&s=28620&rpt=PerformanceElemAndMiddle>.