

## Brief 3: Monitoring School Quality: Overview of Indicators & Landscape Review

*What is the range of indicators that can be used to monitor school quality? Which ones are commonly used in school accountability systems now? Which ones are not, and why?*

### Range of Indicators

Although a wide variety of indicators *could* be used to monitor school quality, in practice, the sets of indicators used by states within their school accountability systems are narrower. The [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine \(NASEM\) Consensus Study Report \(2019\)](#) summarizes sixteen research-based indicators that *could* be used to monitor school quality. These indicators are summarized in the table below in two categories: Indicators of Student Outcomes and Indicators of Access to Resources and Opportunities. As explained in the report,

- **Indicators of Student Outcomes**, “reflect transition points in students’ lives across K–12 education: readiness for the transition into kindergarten, steady progress through the grades, and readiness for the transition to postsecondary endeavors” (p. 119). These student outcome indicators are in domains A, B, and C in the table below.
- **Indicators of Access to Resources and Opportunities**, “reflect structures and resources in the K–12 education system that can mitigate or exacerbate disparities” (p. *ibid*). These indicators of access to resources and opportunities for the remaining four domains, D, E, F, and G, are shown in the table below.

Additionally, the table illustrates the readiness of each indicator for use within a state or federal accountability system, with **red** indicating significant work is needed to implement it, **green** indicating the indicator is ready to be implemented or is already implemented, and **yellow** indicating a moderate level of readiness.

### Current Implementation

The readiness of some indicators for use reflects, in part, the last two decades of federal policy. For example, there has been significant investment in the development of longitudinal data systems that capture student performance on tests over time, along with other related metrics, due to requirements under the *No Child Left Behind Act* and the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA). The readiness in the table above is a direct reflection of this.

ESSA specifically required states to use at least five indicators:

1. Academic achievement in reading and math
2. Another academic indicator, such as growth

3. High school graduation rate
4. Progress toward English language proficiency (ELP)
5. At least one measure of school quality or student success (SQSS)

SQSS is often the place where states include broader measures of school quality beyond standardized test scores (achievement and growth) and graduation rates. The state of implementation of ESSA indicators is reflected in this [summary](#) by the Education Commission of the States, which is shown in the last column of the table below and acts as a landscape review of current implementation in federal accountability systems.

### **Key Challenges & Considerations**

The limited readiness of other indicators for use in Big ‘A’ accountability systems reflects several challenges, including the lack of:

- Standardized tools or protocols for data collection,
- Infrastructure and training to support data collection, and
- Clearly defined uses that avoid unintended consequences.

Any effort to collect the red or yellow-coded indicators will need to address one or more of the challenges listed above. In addition, some indicators require more resources to collect and report than others, so decisions about which indicators to include will inevitably involve trade-offs between cost and comprehensiveness.

| #   | Indicator                                     | What to Measure   | Landscape Review: Current Implementation in ESSA (Federal) Accountability Systems  |
|---|---|---|--|
| <b>Indicators of Student Outcomes</b>         |   |   |  |
| <b>Domain A: Kindergarten Readiness</b>       |   |   |  |
| 1   | <b>Academic Readiness</b>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading/literacy skills at K entry</li> <li>• Numeracy/math skills at K entry</li> </ul>                             | <p>Many states administer and report results from kindergarten-readiness assessments that include academic readiness and social-emotional skills, such as self-regulation and attention. However, these results are not included in current ESSA accountability systems. In other words, the results are reported on the state website but not used to identify schools for Big ‘A’ accountability purposes.</p> |
| 2   | <b>Self-Regulation &amp; Attention Skills</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-regulation skills</li> <li>• Attention skills</li> </ul>  |  |
| <b>Domain B: K-12 Learning and Engagement</b> |   |   |  |
| 3   | <b>Engagement in Schooling</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance/absenteeism</li> <li>• Academic engagement</li> </ul>   | <p>Chronic absenteeism is part of SQSS in 38 states. Two states include student engagement under SQSS by combining multiple factors (e.g., chronic absenteeism, attendance growth, and re-enrollment rate).</p>  |
| 4   | <b>Performance in Coursework</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Success in classes</li> <li>• Accumulating credits (being on track to graduate)</li> <li>• Grades and GPA</li> </ul> | <p>Seven states measure “on track to graduation” as part of SQSS by monitoring credit accumulation or the number of credits earned by the end of 9th grade. Course grades and GPA are not included in current ESSA accountability systems.</p>   |

| #                                       | Indicator                      | What to Measure  | Landscape Review: Current Implementation in ESSA (Federal) Accountability Systems  |
|---|--------------------------------|--|--|
| 5                                       | <b>Performance on Tests</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Achievement in reading, math, and science</li> <li>● Learning growth in reading, math, and science achievement</li> </ul> | ESSA requires the inclusion of achievement and growth in English language arts and mathematics. Some states also include science (17 states), social studies (5 states), or early literacy via K-2 literacy screeners (4 states) as part of SQSS.  |
| <b>Domain C: Educational Attainment</b> |                                |  |  |
| 6                                       | <b>On-Time Graduation</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● On-time graduation</li> </ul>   | ESSA requires the inclusion of the 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate. At the state’s discretion, an extended-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (e.g., 5- and 6-year graduation rates) can be used in addition to, but not in place of, the 4-year rate. Thirty-four states plus DC use extended-year graduation rates. ESSA requires high schools be automatically identified for CSI designations if they have <67% 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate. |
| 7                                       | <b>Postsecondary Readiness</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Enrollment in college</li> <li>● Entry into the workforce</li> <li>● Enlistment in the military</li> </ul>                | At least thirty-seven states include a college/career readiness indicator under SQSS. Commonly used examples include academically focused measures (e.g., a minimum score on the SAT or ACT; completing an AP or dual enrollment course) and career-focused measures (e.g., earning an industry credential or completing CTE classes). Less commonly used examples include military-focused measures (e.g., ASVAB score or enlistment).                              |

| #   | Indicator   | What to Measure   | Landscape Review: Current Implementation in ESSA (Federal) Accountability Systems  |
|---|---|---|--|
| <b>Indicators of Access to Resources and Opportunities</b>          |   |   |  |
| <b>Domain D: Extent of Racial, Ethnic, and Economic Segregation</b> |   |   |  |
| 8   | <b>Students' Exposure to Racial, Ethnic, and Economic Segregation</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concentration of poverty in schools</li> <li>• Racial segregation within and across schools</li> </ul>   | Although states are required to disaggregate performance results by racial/ethnic and economically disadvantaged subgroups, the concentration of poverty or segregation across schools as a structural measure is not included in current ESSA accountability systems. |
| <b>Domain E: Access to High-Quality Early Learning Programs</b>     |   |   |  |
| 9   | <b>Access to and Participation in High-Quality Pre-K Programs</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of licensed pre-K programs</li> <li>• Participation in licensed pre-K programs</li> </ul>   | Not included in current ESSA accountability systems. States have access to data on participation in licensed pre-K programs. This is typically reported every year by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) for each state.                      |
| <b>Domain F: Access to High-Quality Curriculum and Instruction</b>  |   |   |  |
| 10  | <b>Access to Effective Teaching</b>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers' years of experience</li> <li>• Teachers' credentials and certification</li> <li>• Racial and ethnic diversity of the teaching force</li> </ul> | Not included in current ESSA accountability systems. States often report the percentage of teachers teaching in their area of certification at the school and/or district level.   |

| #   | Indicator  | What to Measure   | Landscape Review: Current Implementation in ESSA (Federal) Accountability Systems  |
|---|--|---|--|
| 11  | <b>Access to and Enrollment in Rigorous Coursework</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability and enrollment in advanced, rigorous coursework</li> <li>• Availability and enrollment in advanced placement, International Baccalaureate, and dual enrollment programs</li> <li>• Availability and enrollment in gifted and talented programs</li> </ul> | As mentioned under Indicator 7, at least 37 states include a college and career-readiness indicator in SQSS. Many of those states incorporated an academically focused measure. This indicator focuses on the availability of and enrollment in these rigorous coursework opportunities, not on student performance in them. |
| 12  | <b>Curricular Breadth</b>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability and enrollment in coursework in the arts, social sciences, sciences, technology, and world languages</li> </ul>   | Four states include “access to or participation in non-tested subjects (e.g., Arts, PE)” under SQSS.   |
| 13  | <b>Access to High-Quality Academic Supports</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to and participation in formalized systems of tutoring or other types of academic supports, including special education services and services for English learners</li> </ul>   | Not included in current ESSA accountability systems.   |
| <b>Domain G: Access to Supportive School and Classroom Environments</b> |  |   |  |
| 14  | <b>School Climate</b>                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptions of safety, academic support, academically focused culture, and teacher-student trust</li> </ul>  | At least six states use school climate measures as part of their SQSS indicator.   |
| 15  | <b>Nonexclusionary Discipline Practices</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Out-of-school suspensions and expulsions</li> </ul>  | Two states include a school’s suspension rate in SQSS.   |

| #  | Indicator                                       | What to Measure   | Landscape Review: Current Implementation in ESSA (Federal) Accountability Systems |
|----|---|---|---|
| 16 | <b>Nonacademic Supports for Student Success</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supports for emotional, behavioral, mental, and physical health</li> </ul> | Not included in current ESSA accountability systems.                              |

**Notes:** Table adapted from [Building Educational Equity Indicator Systems: A Guidebook for States and School Districts](#). The last column is based on the [2024 summary of ESSA accountability systems compiled by the Education Commission of the States](#). The readiness of each indicator for use within a state or federal accountability system is shown by the color in the indicator column, with **red** indicating a significant amount of work is needed, **yellow** indicating a moderate level of readiness, and **green** indicating the indicator is ready to be implemented or is already implemented.