



The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Assessment Flexibility under Title I Assessments Section 1111(b)(2)

This document provides answers to common questions about what flexibility exists under ESSA, the newly reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act's (ESEA), Title I assessment requirements. In short, Title I requires assessments aligned with a State's academic standards in the subjects of math, reading or English language arts and Science. Math and reading or English language arts must be assessed annually in grades three through 8 and once in high school. Science must be assessed at least once in each of three grade spans largely mirroring the elementary, middle and high school grade clusters.

Are states required to administer a single year-end assessment to each student in each of the assessed grades under Title I?

No. States have the flexibility to administer ESEA's math, reading or English language arts or science assessments through a single summative assessment, or multiple interim assessments administered throughout the school year. These interim assessment results must be combined into a single summative score for accountability and reporting purposes.

Do states have to administer interim assessments to all students at the same time of the school year?

Nothing in the law or the proposed regulations requires that each interim assessment (if the State adopts such an approach) be administered to all students at the same time of the school year.

Does each student have to answer the exact same assessment questions as all other students, or can states use different assessment items for different students as part of a larger assessment system?

Both the statute and the proposed regulations specifically permit the use of different assessment items, which is exemplified with the use of computer adaptive assessments, but is also true with other assessment designs.

Are states permitted to use performance tasks as part of their assessment systems under Title I?

Yes. States are permitted to use extended performance tasks as methods for partially delivering the results of measures of academic achievement. This authority has been maintained over several versions of ESEA dating back to the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994.

Are State assessment systems permitted to measure growth in academic achievement and use growth as part of a State accountability system?

Yes. ESSA and its proposed regulations specifically permit growth on assessments to be used as part of the State accountability system. This would require State assessment systems to be able to support approaches for documenting student longitudinal academic growth.

Did Congress maintain or make any changes to the State assessment grant program?

ESEA continues to authorize a State assessment grant authority. Under this authority several new uses of funds are listed including:

- Developing or improving balanced assessment systems that include summative, interim, and formative assessments, including supporting local educational agencies in developing or improving such assessments.
- Developing or improving models to measure and assess student progress or student growth on State assessments.
- Measuring student academic achievement using multiple measures of student academic achievement from multiple sources.
- Evaluating student academic achievement through the development of comprehensive academic assessment instruments (such as performance and technology-based academic assessments,

computer adaptive assessments, projects, or extended performance task assessments) that emphasize the mastery of standards and aligned competencies in a competency-based education model.

Are local school districts permitted to use their own assessments in place of State assessments for State accountability system purposes?

Under certain circumstances, yes. ESEA now permits school districts, after approval from their State, to use a “locally selected, nationally recognized” assessment for use in place of the high school assessment required under ESEA. While states would be required to set up an approval process, once an assessment was approved for use in one school district, it would be able to be used in other school districts in that State. In the report that accompanied ESSA, Congress flagged both the SAT and ACT as possible assessments that may be used under this authority, but a negotiated rulemaking panel was clear that states should not be limited to approval of just those two assessments.

Students in 8th grade often have end of course assessments in math. Do they also have to take the State’s 8th grade assessment in addition to the end of course assessment?

No. States may forgo the administration of the 8th grade State assessment for a student in math if the student takes a more advanced end of course assessment in that grade. The State is required to incorporate the results of the end of course assessment into its ESEA accountability system for that school’s 8th grade.

Proposed Regulations: The proposed regulations would require states to describe strategies in place for ensuring that all students have access to the coursework necessary to take an end of course 8th grade math assessment.

Do all students take the same assessment?

Generally, yes, with some exceptions. In addition to the two described above regarding locally selected, nationally recognized assessments and the 8th grade math end of course assessment, states are permitted to assess students with significant cognitive disabilities through an alternate assessment. This assessment must be aligned to State standards and may be administered statewide to no more than the number of students that equal one percent of the total student population in the State.

Nothing in the statute or proposed regulations prevent a State from assessing students using different assessment items, so long as those items are part of the larger assessment system that is aligned to the State’s standards and meets other technical requirements. One specific regulatory and statutory example of this is when a State uses a computer adaptive assessment approach. Under such an approach the statute and proposed regulations specifically permit the use of different assessment items for different students. Additionally, this also allows for certain matrix-sampling designs that provide richer information at the school than is possible when all students complete the same items.

Can a State use college entrance exams such as the ACT or SAT in place of the high school State assessment?

Yes. Several states use these assessments as their high school assessments under ESEA presently. As with other ESEA required assessments, these tests would be required to be aligned to State standards and meet certain technical requirements.

Do all assessments have to measure on grade level performance? How is the performance of students significantly above and below grade level accurately measured?

For the first time the ESEA statute recognizes the ability of states to use computer adaptive assessments and allow the use of below grade level test items through these assessments. This will more accurately reflect the academic achievement of students who are significantly below grade level.

