

## The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): What States Need to Know Now

With the passage of the Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA), states face an incredibly complex transition filled with both opportunities and potential perils. But states should not overreact.

Over the next 18 months, states must continue their transitions to new assessment systems, unwind their waivers, prepare for new opportunities for innovation, and revise their accountability systems to meet new requirements and take advantage of new flexibilities.

ExcelinEd does not recommend that states use the 2016 legislative session to make major changes to their accountability systems that may be out of compliance with ESSA before the U.S. Department of Education has issued crucial regulations interpreting the new law. However, there are certain new opportunities and new requirements that states should know about – and begin to plan for – now.

### FIVE THINGS STATES NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

- 1. States will set their own goals:** Under ESSA states will have freedom to develop their own goals for student proficiency, graduation rate and English proficiency. The goals must expect low-performing groups to make “significant progress” in closing achievement gaps, but the U.S. Department of Education’s ability to review and influence state goals is extremely limited.
- 2. Questions remain around subgroup accountability:** Several confusing passages in the law may make it difficult for a number of states to continue using a subgroup consisting of the lowest performing 25 percent of students. The U.S. Department of Education’s rulemaking will be critical in clarifying whether and how states can continue to use this powerful accountability tool that ensures each school focuses on its most struggling students.
- 3. States must choose an additional indicator of school quality or student success:** Under ESSA, states must include in their accountability systems an indicator of “school quality or student success” that could be non-academic in nature. States may experience pressure to include inputs (percent of students taking fine arts courses, for example) or to weight these factors in a way that dilutes the focus on student learning outcomes. States ought to begin to consider which valid, reliable, statewide indicator would be most appropriate and how they would incorporate that indicator into their accountability system.
- 4. States will select their own school supports and interventions:** States will have tremendous freedom around school turnaround, which is one of the most difficult tasks in all of education reform. States should start to think about what tools they want to have in their turnaround toolbox – achievement school districts, reconstitution, high-performing charters, public school choice, equitable distribution of effective teachers, and/or new curricula based on digital learning.
- 5. New accountability provisions don’t take effect until the 2017-18 school year:** States should wait until final regulations are issued in the fall or winter of 2016 before making any major or permanent changes to their accountability systems. States that opt to make changes during this legislative session may have to reopen their systems for additional changes when the final regulations are released. In the meantime, ExcelinEd is available to help states think through the new requirements and opportunities explained here. For additional information, please review the timeline on page 3.

## FIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STATE INNOVATION

- 1. Leverage federal funds for state priorities:** States should start to identify the policy priorities they would like to support using their allotment of a new Student Support and Academic Enrichment block grant, which could equal up to \$1.6 billion (depending on annual appropriations). For example, states may want to direct this flexible federal funding toward a state K-3 reading program or college and career readiness initiatives such as an AP/IB incentive program.
- 2. Experiment with student-centered funding:** Under a Weighted Student Funding pilot, up to 50 districts will have an opportunity to advance student-centered funding reforms and create the proof points needed for future reauthorizations to include full funding portability supporting choice. States can begin to identify and offer support to those districts interested in participating.
- 3. Streamline and modernize assessment systems:** States will be empowered to transform their assessment systems in two respects. First, states can use federal funds to audit their assessment systems and identify and eliminate repetitive, unnecessary or low-quality assessments. Second, states can experiment with new, more efficient assessment delivery options. The law clarifies that states can use computer adaptive assessments, and tests may be administered as a single test or as a set of interim tests that can be rolled up into a single annual result for each student.
- 4. Pilot new competency-based education models:** Under a new Innovative Assessment Pilot, states and districts can pilot new competency-based learning models and the assessments and accountability systems that support them. States could also use the new block grant to support the development and implementation of competency-based models, including the blended-learning technology needed to support these models of learning.
- 5. Accelerate digital learning:** States will have at least two new sources of support for their digital learning initiatives. States can use a portion of their block grant to build up their technological infrastructure and support the effective use of technology. And, under a new “Direct Support Services” provision, states can set aside Title I funds to support state-directed initiatives such as course access or personalized learning.

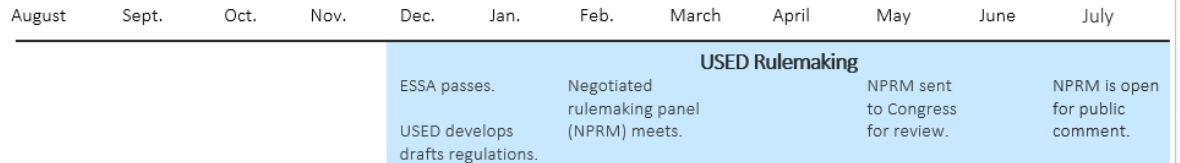
## HOW EXCELINED CAN HELP

Over the coming months, ExcelinEd is available to help states set the stage for new opportunities and prepare to tackle new challenges. This includes the following:

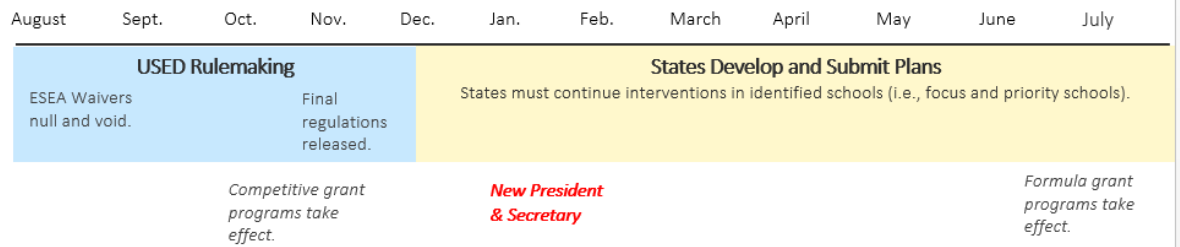
- We can provide summaries of the new legislation and answer technical questions related to accountability system design and the transition from waivers to those new accountability systems;
- We can identify ways that new federal funds can support state reforms in areas including K-3 reading, college and career readiness and digital learning;
- We can support state efforts to participate in the U.S. Department of Education’s rulemaking and implementation of ESSA; and
- We can support state efforts to preserve rigorous standards and assessments and strong accountability systems during the transition to the new law.

# Timeline

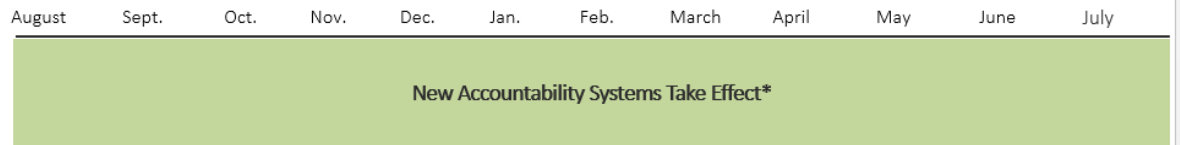
## 2015-16 School Year: Bill Passage and Initial Rulemaking



## 2016-17 School Year: Transition



## 2017-18 School Year: New Systems in Place



\* It is not clear from the legislation when states will first be required to identify a new set of schools based on their accountability systems under ESSA (i.e., will the identification be based on 2016-17 data or 2017-18 data). We hope to have more clarity on the timeline from the U.S. Department of Education in the coming months.