

Best of Both Worlds: Assessments that Help Every Student Succeed

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Today's Agenda

What We're Talking About Today

- The basics of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and its vision for K–12 education
- Evolving K–12 standards and assessment policy landscape
- How ESSA enables the use of nationally recognized college readiness assessments for federal accountability
- Research supporting the use of the ACT[®] test for ESSA accountability purposes
- Evidence that administering the ACT supports postsecondary pathways for students
- How ACT is working with states to make use of the ACT and meet ESSA's requirements

What is ESSA?

The Every Student Succeeds Act

- Renewed the primary federal aid program(s) for K–12 education (ESEA)
- Scope and breadth of ESEA has grown substantially since inception
- Maintains central goals of ESEA—promoting student achievement and closing state & local equity gaps
- Seeks to broadly reduce federal footprint in education

From NCLB to ESSA

From Minimum Competency to Readiness

- Both founded on principles of standards-based educational reform
- State content standards under NCLB focused on *minimum competency*
- Over time, states adopted CCR standards and focus shifted towards *postsecondary readiness*
- During this period, the ACT was used as part of states' strategies to increase college access and develop college readiness indicators

What Does ESSA Say About Assessment?

- Maintains requirement for assessment in grades 3 through 8 + once in high school in math and reading
- Requires that at least 95% of students be tested and caps alternative assessments at 1% of students
- Assessments must provide “appropriate accommodations” and equal benefits for students with disabilities & English Learners
- Maintains many existing technical criteria requirements
- Allows states and local school districts to use “nationally recognized tests” in lieu of existing high school assessments

What Does ESSA Say About Standards?

- Federal prohibition ensuring that USDE cannot control state academic standards
- States must have “challenging” academic content standards *and* academic achievement standards
- Required subjects: math, reading, and science
- Same standards for *all* schools and students
- Standards must align with relevant state CTE standards and “entrance requirements” for higher education in the state

The ACT & Federal Accountability

- ESSA codified the use of the ACT for the purposes of ESSA accountability
- Two options: statewide or locally-selected
- In order to use the ACT for either, *states* must submit the ACT for a “peer review” process
- Peer review process, among other requirements, must determine the ACT’s *alignment* to states’ academic standards

The ACT & Federal Accountability (Cont.)

Two Options for using the ACT...

- Section 1111(b)(2)(H) new flexibility - locally selected 'nationally recognized high school assessment' approved by the state and peer reviewed.
- Two options:
 - Adopt a nationally recognized test (ACT) to meet academic achievement indicator requirement. ACT statewide use.
 - Permit the use of a nationally recognized test (ACT) as a substitute for the state test in selected LEAs.

What Do the Authors of ESSA Say?

ESSA Conference Report (H.Rept. 114-354)

- *“It is the intent of the Conferees to allow flexibility for States and local educational agencies to select and use any nationally-recognized high school assessment that is approved for selection after meeting the regulatory requirements of this paragraph.”*
- *“It is the intent of the Conferees that existing assessments already widely recognized as validly measuring student performance, such as ACT or SAT exams, may, subject to approval described in this subparagraph, be selected and used”*

The Policy Context

Why Does ESSA Provide New Assessment Options?

- Putting states and districts back in the driver's seat and easing statutory / regulatory burden
- More readily promotes college-and-career readiness objectives
- Growing recognition that a high school diploma is insufficient for success in today's economy
- Aligns ESSA's accountability objectives with assessment policy (outputs vs. inputs)

Standards Alignment & Implications for the ACT

- States embraced the CCR standards-based reform movement and adopted standards that reflect knowledge and skills needed after high school
- Determining assessment alignment to breadth and depth of state academic standards is therefore a holistic process
- ESSA cemented in federal law that state academic standards should prepare students for postsecondary pathways
- ESSA necessarily reflects that assessment is not a binary choice between postsecondary readiness or mastery of academic standards

The Dimensions of Alignment

The Alignment Trilogy

- Alignment of standards to entry-level coursework in college
- Alignment of assessments to standards
- Alignment of assessments to entry-level coursework in college

Challenging Academic Standards & Assessments

State Academic Standards

*“State academic standards are aligned with entrance requirements for credit-bearing coursework in the system of public higher education in the State and relevant State career technical standards”
Sec. 1111(b)(1)(D)(i)*

- Evidence that ACT’s content is aligned to college coursework
- National Curriculum Survey
- Benchmarks
- Predictive validity studies
- Construct validity
- NAGB survey of placement testing

Challenging Academic Standards & Assessments (Cont.)

- Assessments shall be aligned with challenging State academic standards, and provide coherent and timely information about student attainment of such standards...
- Be used for purposes for which such assessments are valid and reliable, consistent with relevant national recognized professional and technical testing standards, objectively measure achievement, knowledge, and skills, and be tests that do not evaluate or assess personal or family beliefs...Sec.1111(b)(2)(B)(i)(III).

Arguments for use of ACT for Accountability

Criticism	Evidence per Standards for Ed and Psych Testing (2014)
Not originally designed for accountability	Need to provide evidence to support claims for each use – No restriction against new uses if evidence exists
Not aligned	Alignment is not binary. Alignment is one of degrees. No single factor should be determinative. Multiple sources of validity. Strong evidence from one source doesn't outweigh the need for additional sources of evidence
	Greater alignment means more items and a longer test. Newer alignment methods more appropriate (Forte, 2017)
	Empirical evidence demonstrates ACT predicts college grades and success. Measures most essential skills NOT every skill
	ACT is clearly aligned to entry level coursework (NCS, NAGB, predictive validity) – issue may be with alignment between state standards and entry level coursework
Lack performance levels and PLDs	ACT has assisted states in setting cut scores and developing policy and content PLDs
Lack DOK, cognitive complexity	Many items classified at DOK 3, Performance tasks require extra time and introduce additional costs, lower reliabilities

Additional Benefits of State Use of the ACT

- College-reportable scores
- Get students on radar of colleges and vice versa (Anderson, 2014)
- Increased effort on tests (Finn, 2015)
- Reduced testing time by 50% or more
- Scores also for placement, scholarships, etc.
- Increased college enrollment rates (Allen, 2015; Hymen, 2017; Klasik, 2013)
- Stability of test design and scores over years – Consortia tests have had 2-3 redesigns in 5 yrs, other tests have as well.

Questions?