

essaNEBRASKA

Nebraska Department of Education Mission: To lead and support the preparation of all Nebraskans for learning, earning, and living.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is a bi-partisan federal education bill passed in 2015 focused on ensuring a quality education for *all* students regardless of race, zip code, language proficiency, or disability. The ESSA planning process provided Nebraska an opportunity to seamlessly blend its recently developed Strategic Vision and Direction and accountability system, AQuESTT. Nebraska approached ESSA by considering where to focus federal resources to better support struggling schools, historically underserved students, and the recruitment and development of highly-effective educators. The purpose of this document is to provide a high-level overview of the state’s plans to further equity and excellence for its 312,000 students through federal resources and programs.

Section 1: Long Term Goals

ESSA calls for each state to establish “ambitious long-term goals and measurements of interim progress” for each accountability indicator. The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) aligned these long-term goals with those established in the strategic plan. In the ESSA plan, the NDE outlined goals and benchmarks for all students and all major subgroups of students including students of color, students with disabilities, and students who are economically disadvantaged. Overall, Nebraska seeks to *reduce the number of non-proficient students in each subgroup by at least 50 percent in 10 years*. The NDE is also proposing a set of Challenge or Stretch goals to accelerate the closing of achievement gaps. If the Department notes student progress exceeding the 50 percent reduction model, then the NDE may consider using Challenge Goals as the state’s long-term goals.

Section 2: Consultation and Performance Management – Feedback from Stakeholders

ESSA requires extensive outreach and engagement efforts to everyone from policymakers to educators to tribal organizations to parents. The NDE’s commitment to engaging stakeholders goes beyond compliance to two-way communication that allows shared decision-making and support of the Strategic Vision and Direction. Feedback from the development of AQuESTT in 2014 and Strategic Vision and Direction in 2016 provide the foundation for the ESSA plan. Specific ESSA outreach took place with a statewide listening tour held in seven locations from Scottsbluff to Omaha, online resources, ready-to-deploy engagement materials, and an online feedback survey. Finally, the NDE engaged in a productive dialogue with Governor Pete Ricketts. The Department is committed to working closely with the Governor to explore changes to current policies and to better engage stakeholders.

Section 3: Standards and Assessments for English Learners (Title III)

In 2016, 6.2 percent of Nebraska’s student population were considered English Learners (ELs). For the first time, federal law under ESSA requires states to include measures of EL progress in state accountability systems, motivating states to attack the EL achievement gap. Nebraska has responded by highlighting its work with the ELPA21 consortium¹, translating NeSA tests into major languages, and including EL proficiency in the “Growth” indicator. Using baseline data from the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years, the state set long-term goals for reducing the percentage of students not meeting growth targets measured by ELPA21 assessments.

Section 4: Accountability, Support, and Improvement for Schools (Title I)

At its core, ESSA focuses on educational equity for all students. The law mandates states to create an accountability system that identifies schools most in need of support and intervention. Federal law requires five major components, or indicators, for state accountability systems. Indicators include academic achievement, academic progress, graduation rate, progress for English Learners, and a state-determined “fifth indicator” of school quality or student success.

The NDE proposes maintaining the basic structure and functionality of AQuESTT. Schools will still be rated on a one to four scale and ultimately classified as Excellent, Great, Good, or Needs Improvement. While additional indicators may be added at a later time, the proposed metrics to be used are seen in Table 1 below. Nebraska plans to include chronic absenteeism as the indicator for school quality or student success. Another additional indicator is the inclusion of English Learner proficiency in the “Growth” rating area. A taskforce will meet in the fall to recommend updates to AQuESTT resulting from ESSA requirements.

Table 1- AQuESTT - ESSA Crosswalk

ESSA Indicator:	Academic Achievement	Academic Progress	English Learner Proficiency	Graduation Rate	School Quality or Student Success	School Quality or Student Success	Other Indicators
AQuESTT Rating Area:	Status	Growth, Improvement, Non-Proficiency	Growth	4- or 7-Year Cohort Graduation Rate	Chronic Absenteeism	Science	Evidence-Based Analysis (EBA)

¹ ELPA21 is a group of states that designed and developed an assessment system for English Learners. The system is based on the English Language Proficiency Standards and addresses language demands needed to be college and career ready.

School Improvement

Once schools are meaningfully differentiated by the state accountability system, each state must then detail its supports for improving the lowest performing schools. Schools needing improvement are categorized in two ways:

- Comprehensive Support and Improvement – Lowest performing five percent of Title I schools, public high schools with a four-year adjusted cohort grad rate of 75 percent or below, and/or schools participating in Targeted Support and Improvement that did not improve over a state-determined number of years.
- Targeted Support and Improvement – Schools with consistently underperforming subgroup(s) or low-performing subgroup(s) over a state-designated period of time.

New to ESSA, rather than separate school improvement grants and Title I dollars, state efforts must be unified and financed by a mandatory seven percent set-aside in Title I funding. The NDE has decided to use the bulk of its Title I

funding to support the schools identified as “In Need of Comprehensive Support and Improvement.” Schools identified as “In Needs of Comprehensive Support and Improvement” will complete a two-step process by first implementing a comprehensive needs assessment. The state then will distribute funding to applicants who show the greatest need. Improvement efforts will be supported by the NDE, ESUs, and capacity building at the school level.

The NDE is charged with identifying three Priority Schools among those classified as Needs Improvement. Supports and intervention in ESSA mirror the state’s own efforts to improve its Priority Schools. In the future, three schools will be identified as Priority Schools (state-funded improvement activities) and roughly 24 schools identified as In Needs of Comprehensive Support and Improvement (qualifying them for federally-funded improvement activities). This identification and improvement process will occur on a three-year cycle. Title I funding will be used for the lowest performing schools in the 2017-18 school year, but the NDE plans to carry over as much funding as possible to provide more significant support in the following round.

Section 5: Supporting Effective Educators (Title II)

Nebraska’s ESSA plan describes several state-level initiatives and activities that are expected to improve student achievement by way of influencing educator effectiveness and equitable access to high-quality teaching. The plan details the use of Title II-A funds to be used by Local Education Agencies for professional development, induction and other activities for new teachers, rigorous evaluation of educators, and strategies for recruiting, developing, and retaining teachers. The NDE recounts its 2015 Educator Equity Plan, and the work toward achieving many of the goals and recommendations outlined in it for achieving equitable distribution of effective teachers. Finally, the NDE describes how it will use an additional three percent set-aside from Title II-A funds to further statewide activities and efforts for supporting effective educators, with focused efforts directed toward school leadership.

Section 6: Supporting all Students – Well-Rounded Services (Title IV and VI)

The final section in Nebraska’s ESSA plan explains many of the other important federal programs targeting the academic and non-academic needs of the most disadvantaged students, including students with disabilities, the lowest-achieving students, homeless and at risk youth, immigrant students, and American Indian students. Highlighted activities include Nebraska’s 21st Century Community Learning Centers, participation in the Rural Education Achievement Program, the McKinney-Vento Act for homeless youth, education of migratory children, and mini-grants for Title IV-A.

Table 2-Indicator Definitions

Indicator	Definition
Status	Rating based on average NeSA scores for ELA and math for grades 3-8, and ACT for high schools.
Growth	An adjustment to the Status rating may be made based on the percent of NeSA scores that showed improvement compared to the same individual’s performance in the previous year. This indicator will now also include ELPA21 progress. (Since high school students only take the ACT once, Growth does not apply.)
Improvement	An adjustment to Status is based on an upward trend in average NeSA scores across all subjects for the last three years. This adjustment can reward schools that are generally improving NeSA and ACT scores.
Non-Proficiency	An adjustment to the overall classification rating is made based on a decreasing or increasing three-year trend of the percentage of NeSA or ACT assessment scores that are defined as non-proficient.
Graduation Rate	For each school, a four- or seven-year cohort graduation rate in the previous year defines the maximum possible overall classification rating.
Chronic Absenteeism	A student is identified as chronically absent when a district reports that he or she has not been present for 10 percent or more of the days that he or she was “in membership” at a school. NDE staff in coordination with the Technical Advisory Council and the AQuESTT 2.0 task force will recommend a final method for evaluating reduction of chronic absenteeism in elementary, middle, and high schools.
Evidence-Based Analysis	The EBA is a tool used to obtain information about the measures of the six tenets of AQuESTT. Each public school completes an EBA questionnaire used to explain policies and practices. School classifications can be adjusted up due to promising practices evidenced by the EBA.