ESSA-NORTH STAR ACCOUNTABILITY FAQ

The Minnesota Department of Education released the first results of Minnesota’s new school accountability system on Aug. 30, 2018. The North Star accountability system complies with new federal Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA. Here is a summary of the first release and some guidance for educators about what comes next.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MDE RELEASE

- 582 Minnesota schools recognized for excellence
- 485 schools marked for support; 194 for “comprehensive” and “targeted” support.
  - NOTE: The Legislature has allocated no additional funding for this support.
- The state no longer bases accountability solely on proficiency scores. North Star uses five key indicators:
  1. Academic achievement as measured by standardized tests of “meets standards,” “exceeds standards,” etc.
  2. Progress toward English proficiency as a growth measure for ELL students.
  3. Academic progress as measured by growth scores on standardized tests.
  4. Graduation rates as measured by four-year and seven-year rates from high schools.
  5. Consistent attendance is the percentage of students attending over 90 percent of the time.
- Commissioner Brenda Cassellius took a hard swing at testing in the inaugural news release: “For over 20 years, we have relied far too much on test scores as the sole measure of school performance. This misguided approach has resulted in a status quo that has not only skewed the perception of how our schools are doing, it has narrowed and limited opportunities for students to experience a rich and well-rounded education.”

THE POSITIVES

- The system puts standardized testing in its place as only one of many measures.
- Refreshing change from the unproductive, unreliable blame-and-shame system under No Child Left Behind. Now it’s about supports - not punishments.
- The MDE listened to hundreds of educators over two years to develop the system.
- Comprehensive Needs Assessments will give parents, community leaders and frontline educators an opportunity to report what their schools need.
  - Grassroots reform, not top-down theories.
  - About 200 schools marked for “comprehensive” and “targeted” support must do CNAs. The other schools may do them.
  - Hundreds of CNA team members will hold local politicians accountable.
- School Improvement Teams of educators, parents, administrators, etc., will take the CNAs and other sources of data to develop local strategies for improvement.
  - These teams may drive demand for full-service community schools and restorative practices.

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THE NEGATIVES

- ESSA still requires annual testing. Education Minnestoa prefered grade-span testing.
- Should put even more information into the hands of parents, including school climate data and measure of how well a school offers a broad curriculum.
- There’s no funding for the additional support and needs identified by CNAs.
- Too complex of a process, but that’s a smaller concern now that the emphasis is on raising up schools rather than tearing them down.

WHAT’S NEXT FOR IDENTIFIED SCHOOLS

- Schools will begin a year-long planning process.
- School improvement teams will be formed to analyze data, evaluate comprehensive needs assessments and select improvement strategies.
- School improvement teams will consist of educators, administrators, parents and members of the community.
- Educators, parents and students will participate in completing comprehensive needs assessments so the school improvement can target the biggest needs.
- Regional Centers of Excellence will work with schools identified for comprehensive support to help improvement teams with analysis and improvement strategies.
- Schools will begin implementing improvement plans in the fall of 2019.

WHAT I SHOULD DO NEXT

- Talk to fellow members in your building about joining the school improvement team.
- Reach out to parents to join the school improvement team.
- Look for trainings on ESSA implementation hosted by Education Minnesota.
- Contact Paul Winkelaar from Education Minnesota at 651-245-6143 or paul.winkelaar@edmn.org with any questions, documents or trainings.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM EDUCATION MINNESOTA

- Facebook Live events, webinars and local trainings to explain ESSA and the possibilities around school improvement teams and comprehensive needs assessments.
- Education Minnesota will create comprehensive needs assessment templates for:
  - Elementary students
  - Secondary students
  - Families
  - Educators
- Ongoing support for school improvement teams and ESSA plan implementation.