

# High School State Assessment in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Frequently Asked Questions

## 1. *What are the basic high school academic assessment requirements outlined in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)?*

- ▶ At its most simple level, States must administer to all high school students the same assessment in each of three content areas:
  - Reading/language arts
  - Mathematics
  - Science
- ▶ Students are required to take an assessment in reading/language arts and mathematics at least once in grades 9 through 12, and an assessment in science at least once in grades 6 through 9 and 10 through 12.
- ▶ Please refer to Question #3 for exceptions to this general requirement.

*The remainder of these Frequently Asked Questions address academic assessment requirements under the ESEA, as amended by the ESSA, for the general student population.*

## 2. *Are there any other required high school assessments in the ESEA, as amended by ESSA?*

- ▶ For English Learners (ELs) enrolled in high school, there is also a requirement for annual assessments of English Language Proficiency (ELP).

## 3. *Are there exceptions to the general requirement that the same assessments be administered to all students?*

- ▶ There are four exceptions to the statutory requirement that all students be assessed with the same assessments:
  - If a State has adopted alternate academic achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, the State must administer an alternate assessment aligned with the alternate academic achievement standards to those students.
  - A State that administers an end-of-course (EOC) high school mathematics assessment for Federal accountability purposes may exempt a student who takes that math assessment in 8th grade from the 8th grade math assessment the State typically administers if the student, in high school, will take a State-administered EOC or nationally recognized high school assessment in mathematics that is more advanced than the assessment the State administers to all high school students.
  - If a State allows a local education agency (LEA) to administer a nationally recognized high school assessment in place of one or more of the statewide high school assessments, then high school students in that LEA may take a nationally recognized high school assessment in place of the

statewide high school assessment. However, in this case each high school student in the LEA must take the same nationally recognized high school assessment.

- Students in a participating LEA (or in a participating school in such LEA) in a State that has authority to implement an innovative assessment demonstration pilot may take the innovative assessment in place of the statewide assessment.

**4. *Can computer adaptive assessments (CATs) be used for Federal accountability purposes, even though students may not all be administered the same assessment items?***

- ▶ Yes, as long as the CAT that is administered measures each student’s academic proficiency based on State standards for the student’s grade level and growth toward those standards in a technically sound manner using the same test blueprint. A measurement of student growth may be determined using items either above or below the student’s grade level.<sup>1</sup> States administering CATs must always report and use student academic proficiency in accountability based on challenging grade-level academic standards. Section 1111(b)(1)(A) of the ESEA defines “challenging State academic standards” to include both academic content standards and academic achievement standards.

**5. *Can a State offer a menu of high school assessments for LEAs to choose from to use for Federal accountability purposes? For example, can a State offer the option for schools/districts to choose one of three assessments for high school mathematics (e.g., students can take either an Algebra 1, Algebra 2, or Geometry assessment) for Federal accountability purposes?***

- ▶ No. A State cannot offer high schools a menu/choice of which assessment(s) can be used for Federal accountability purposes. With the exceptions noted in Question #3, all students are required to take the same academic assessments aligned to the same challenging academic standards.<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ States must establish the single statewide assessment to use for all students in each required subject area.
- ▶ States may also choose instead to utilize a series of multiple statewide interim assessments during the course of the academic year that result in a single, summative score that provides valid, reliable, and transparent information on student achievement, or growth.<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that even if States choose to use multiple interim assessments that result in a single summative score, the interim assessments administered must be uniform across the State and be administered to all students.
- ▶ All States must submit the assessment(s) they wish to utilize for high school Federal accountability to the mandated peer review process stated in § 1111(a)(4) of ESSA, which must meet the technical requirements of the Department of Education (ED). For more information on the peer review process, consult the Peer Review Assistance resources available from the [U.S. Department of Education website](#) and the [Center on Standards & Assessment Implementation](#).

**6. *How does the exception for advanced mathematics in 8th grade fit in with high school accountability?***

- ▶ In order to be exempted from the State assessment used for accountability in mathematics for 8th grade,<sup>4</sup> an 8th grade student must take the specific EOC assessment the State typically administers in order to meet the assessment and accountability requirements for students in grades 9 through 12. That student’s achievement on the assessment must then be included in the appropriate indicators<sup>5</sup> in place of the grade 8 assessment.

<sup>1</sup> See ESSA § 1111(b)(2)(J)(i) for full statute.

<sup>2</sup> See ESSA § 1111(b)(2)(B)(i)(I), § 1111(b)(2)(B)(i)(II), and § 1111(b)(2)(B)(ii) for full statutes.

<sup>3</sup> See ESSA § 1111(b)(2)(B)(viii)(II) for full statute.

<sup>4</sup> See ESSA § 1111(b)(2)(C) for full statute.

<sup>5</sup> See ESSA § 1111(c)(4)(B) for full statute.

- ▶ When such a student reaches high school, the student must participate in an assessment for accountability purposes. This assessment must be a State-administered EOC or a nationally recognized high school assessment that is more advanced than the assessment taken by the student in 8th grade, and it must be used to measure the student’s academic achievement with respect to appropriate high school math indicators.

**7. *Can a State allow an LEA to use individual EOC assessments in place of statewide summative assessments for Federal accountability purposes if the State does not administer such individual EOC assessments statewide?***

- ▶ No, with the exception noted in Question #6 with respect to EOCs administered in high school to students who take the high school mathematics assessment in 8th grade. To meet the requirements of the ESEA, as amended by the ESSA, a State must administer the same assessments to all students in the subject areas of mathematics and reading or language arts at least once in grades 9 through 12, and in science at least once in grades 6 through 9 and grades 10 through 12. A State may administer any other assessment in any other subject at the discretion of the State.

**8. *If a State has adopted statewide EOCs in the required subject areas (e.g., Algebra 2, English II, and Biology), can scores from these assessments be used for Federal accountability purposes?***

- ▶ Potentially. A State that wishes to administer a particular EOC in a required subject area must be able to report data so that all students in a grade are accounted for. Many States implement a cohort reporting system to accomplish this. A State should not simply report the annual results on a given assessment, regardless of a student’s grade level when taking the assessment. Instead, the cohort approach would be applied to the same test offered at multiple grade levels. For example, a State can have a single test used for accountability purposes, but schools/students have the opportunity to take the assessment during the 9th, 10th, 11th, or 12th grade. Cohort reporting requires States to submit scores for student cohort groups, documenting that all students in a cohort eventually take the same assessment for accountability purposes, as required by the ESEA, as amended by the ESSA.
- ▶ If a State’s systems are not equipped to manage cohort reporting of assessments, the State may wish to consider administering grade-level assessments for accountability in the required content areas.

**9. *Does a State need to report all statewide assessments administered and used as requirements for high school graduation for Federal accountability purposes as well?***

- ▶ No. A State need not report all high school EOCs and/or other assessments used as high school graduation requirements for Federal accountability purposes. A State may choose to report all assessments required for diploma criteria at its discretion. States must report the assessments described in the answer to Question #1 above.

**10. *May a State allow its LEAs to select and administer a nationally recognized high school assessment for Federal accountability purposes in lieu of developing a statewide assessment?***

- ▶ No. States must first establish one high school assessment that is required statewide for each required content area. That assessment, however, may be a nationally recognized high school assessment, provided it meets other applicable requirements.

### 11. How can LEAs take advantage of the locally selected assessment flexibility<sup>6</sup> outlined in ESSA?

- ▶ Once a single assessment is adopted statewide for each required subject area, States may then choose to permit an LEA to request to administer a nationally recognized high school assessment for Federal accountability purposes in place of the statewide high school assessment.
- ▶ The flexibility surrounding nationally recognized high school assessments offered for local selection in ESSA requires all assessments to meet certain criteria before such assessments may be utilized for accountability purposes.
- ▶ For an LEA to receive approval from its state education agency (SEA), the assessment must:
  - meet State technical criteria as established by the State;
  - undergo State approval, including:
    - a review conducted by the SEA to determine if the proposed assessment meets or exceeds the previously established technical criteria;
    - submission of evidence to the Federal assessment peer review process that demonstrates the assessment in question meets the requirements outlined under §1111(b)(2)(H)(v).

### 12. If a State approves the use of a nationally recognized high school academic assessment for Federal accountability by a requesting LEA, do subsequent requests for use of the same assessment for the same purposes need to undergo the peer review process again?

- ▶ No. Once an assessment undergoes the approval process described in §1111(b)(2)(H) of ESEA, as amended by ESSA, and is approved by a particular SEA, the process does not need to be repeated for any subsequent requests made by LEAs in that State to use that same assessment.<sup>7</sup> However, requests related to the same assessment by an LEA in another State would need to follow the full process in that State. In particular, an assessment must be aligned to a particular State's challenging standards, so the review in the context of another State would not obviate that process.

### 13. Are there additional regulations which detail requirements for statewide assessments?

- ▶ Yes. [The Code of Federal Regulations \(CFR\), Part 34, Sections 200.1 through 200.8](#) list the regulations regarding academic assessments based on ESEA, as amended by ESSA.

<sup>6</sup> See ESSA §1111(b)(2)(H) for full statute.

<sup>7</sup> See ESSA §1111(b)(2)(H)(iv)(II) for full statute.



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