



# THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT: WHAT'S IN IT? WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR EQUITY? ASSESSMENTS

JANUARY 2016

## Why do assessments matter for equity?

Statewide, annual assessments aligned with state standards are an important way of measuring student progress consistently across classrooms, schools, and districts.<sup>1</sup> They provide parents with objective information about whether their children are academically on-track. They help educators benchmark the performance of their students against those across the state. And they give parents and the public an objective measure of how schools are doing at improving learning for all groups of students.

## What does the Every Student Succeeds Act require?

### *Statewide, annual assessment*

States have to test all students on statewide assessments in the following areas: reading/language arts and math every year in grades three through eight and once in high school; and science once between grades three and five, once between six and nine, and once again between 10 and 12.

These tests must provide valid, reliable, and comparable information on whether all students are meeting state standards in each subject.

### *Assessment of English learners*

States have to measure English learners' progress toward English-language proficiency on statewide assessments given to all English learners annually.

States have to give English proficiency and math assessments to English learners starting in their first year in U.S. schools. In that first year, states may choose to excuse English learners from taking the reading/language arts assessment. Starting in their second year in U.S. schools, all English learners have to participate in all statewide annual assessments, though the reading/

language arts assessment may be administered in the student's native language for up to five years.

### *Strictly limited exceptions for students with disabilities*

States can develop alternate assessments aligned with alternate achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, but can administer these assessments to no more than 1 percent of all students statewide. (Research shows that this fraction — which is equivalent to about 10 percent of all students with special needs — captures the number of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.)

### *Options for high school tests*

States can choose to let districts give a nationally recognized assessment — like the SAT or ACT — in place of the statewide high school assessment. In order to use this option, the state has to make sure that the nationally recognized assessment is aligned to state standards, meets the same technical quality requirements as the state assessment, generates information that's comparable to the information generated by the state test, and can be used in the state's accountability system.

### *Options for assessment innovation*

The U.S. Secretary of Education can establish a pilot program for states that want to develop innovative assessment systems, such as competency-based or performance-based assessments. Participating states can choose to initially try out these assessments in only some of their districts, but must use them statewide after successful piloting, or discontinue their use. These systems must also meet all the technical requirements of statewide assessments, including providing comparable data for all students.

### *Support for reducing unnecessary tests*

The law encourages states to review all the assessments they and their districts give in order to get rid of low-quality or duplicative tests, and provides funding to states to support this process.

1. When used in this document, the term "district" refers to both traditional public school districts and charters.

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## What key questions should equity-minded advocates be asking?

- Both the option to use a nationally recognized assessment at the high school level and the innovative assessment pilot introduce the possibility of students in different districts taking different tests. What safeguards need to be in place to ensure that these assessments are rigorous and truly comparable to statewide tests?
- Have states developed appropriate assessments for English learners, including assessments in the students' native languages? How will they ensure that English learners are provided with the right assessment accommodations?
- How will states ensure that students with disabilities are provided with the right assessment accommodations? Have states developed appropriate alternate assessments for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities?



**The Education Trust**