

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



ESSA grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did NCLB. Three of the most important improvements states can make are to: (1) assign to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public; (2) encourage schools to focus on all students, not just their low performers; and (3) measure and judge all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty.

To determine whether the District of Columbia's proposed ESSA accountability system accomplishes these three objectives, this analysis evaluates its state plan, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on May 2, 2017,³⁴ as explained below.

1 Are the labels or ratings for schools clear and intuitive for parents, educators, and the public?

D.C. is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use a five-star system for schools' annual ratings. This model immediately conveys to all observers how well a given school is performing.

2 Does the rating system encourage schools to focus on all students?

There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. The District of Columbia receives a **strong** because those two components constitute 50 percent of schools' annual ratings. A performance index counts for 30 percent, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. And a measure of growth for all students constitutes another 20 percent of schools' summative ratings, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.

3 Is the rating system fair to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty?

D.C. earns a **medium** here because academic growth will constitute 40 percent of schools' annual ratings—split evenly between growth for all students and growth to proficiency. Growth measures gauge changes in pupil achievement over time, independent of prior achievement, and are therefore less correlated with poverty—thus affording high-poverty schools the opportunity to earn positive ratings.