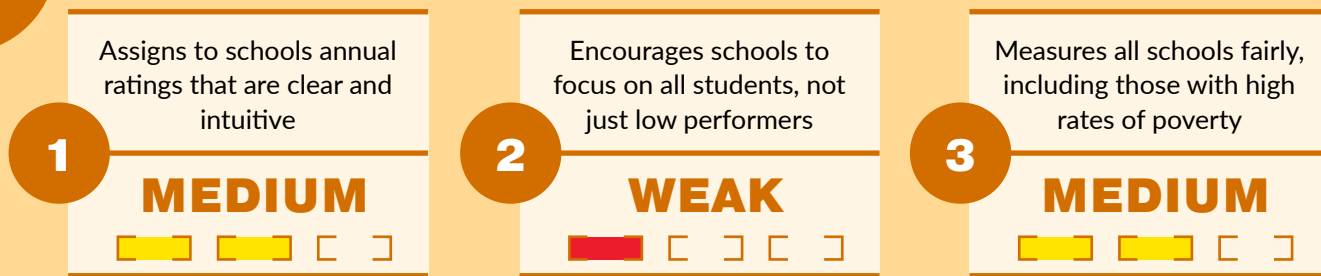


DELAWARE



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 Delaware'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 April 3, 2017,³³ as explained below.

1

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

Delaware's plan earns a **medium** on this point because it proposes to use text labels as schools' annual ratings. Although the proposed labels are easy to understand, in isolation each one fails to communicate how much better or worse a given school could do (it's not instantly clear to a parent, for example, whether "exceeds expectations" is Delaware's best possible rating). This model fails to convey immediately 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. Delaware receives a **weak** because it measures achievement with proficiency rates, which may encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—and because a measure of growth for all students constitutes less than 33 percent of schools' annual ratings, which is apt to lead schools to disregard the educational needs of higher-achieving children, especially those in high-poverty schools.

3

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

Delaware earns a **medium** here because academic growth of any kind will constitute 35 percent of schools' annual ratings—comprising overall growth for all students in math and English language arts, growth to proficiency, and growth of the lowest- and highest-achieving student quartiles. 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.