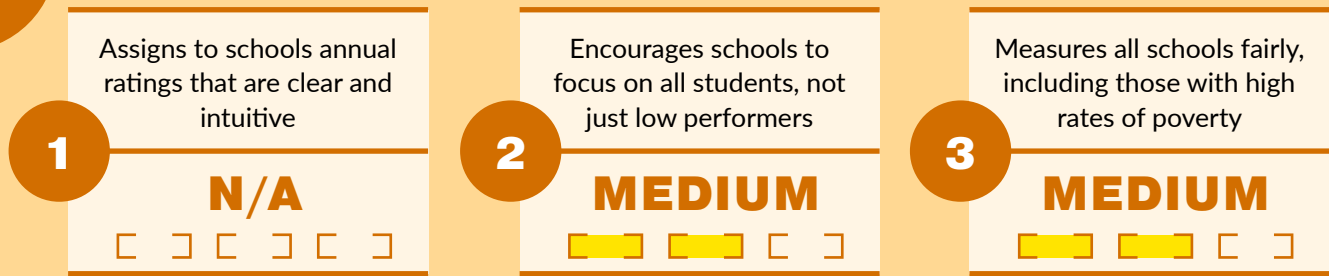


MONTANA



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 Montana’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 September 14, 2017,⁵⁵ as explained below.

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

Montana receives a mark of **not applicable** because it is still deciding between text-based summative annual ratings and those that are similar to A–F, five-star, and numeric ratings. We encourage policymakers to adopt ratings that fall into the latter group to ensure that they’re clear and intuitive for educators, parents, and the general public.

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 and/or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement and (2) measure the growth of all students. Montana receives a **medium** because—despite measuring achievement with proficiency rates, which might encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—student-level growth for all students constitutes 33 percent of schools’ annual ratings, which should at least partially encourage 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?

Montana gets a **medium** here because student-level growth will constitute 33 percent of schools’ annual ratings.⁵⁶ 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.