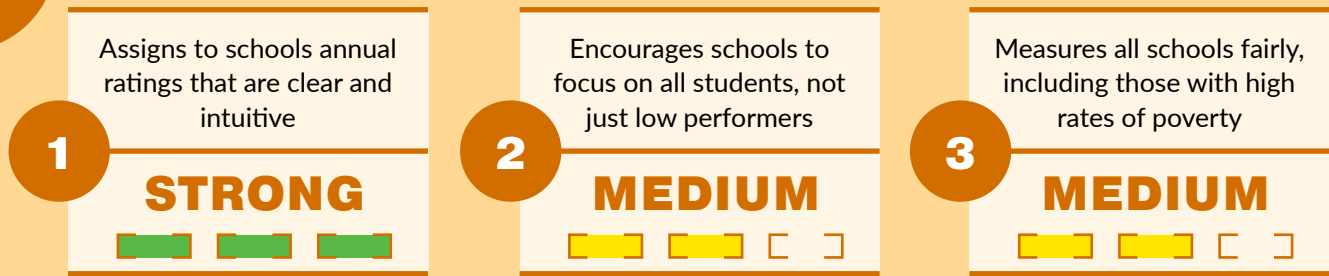


NEBRASKA



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 Nebraska'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 22, 2017,⁵⁷ as explained below.

1

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

Nebraska's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use a four-tier 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. Nebraska doesn't assign specific weights to its indicators, but it earns a **medium** here because scale scores are the foundation of its system and it uses a measure of growth for all students. The state should more clearly signal to schools how important these two factors are. But the current framework will help encourage schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency and heed the educational needs of every child.

3

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

Nebraska doesn't assign specific weights to its indicator, but it still earns a **medium** rating because its use of three growth measures—school-level growth, student-level growth, and the progress of non-proficient students—communicates to schools that academic growth is a priority. This is important because 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.