

TENNESSEE

1 Assigns to schools annual ratings that are clear and intuitive

STRONG



2 Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers

MEDIUM



3 Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

STRONG



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 Tennessee'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 3, 2017,²⁵ as explained below.

1

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

Tennessee's plan is **strong** on this point because it proposes to use an A–F grading 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. Tennessee receives a **medium** because—despite measuring achievement with proficiency rates, which might encourage schools to focus on pupils near the proficiency cutoff—a measure of growth for all students constitutes 35 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?

Tennessee is **strong** here because academic growth will constitute 80 percent of schools' annual ratings—35 percent growth for all students and 45 percent 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.