

**INCLUDING ENGLISH
LEARNERS IN YOUR STATE
TITLE I ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN**

THE COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

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Suggested Citation: Hakuta, K. and Pompa D. (2017). *Including English Learners in Your State Title I Accountability Plan*. Washington DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.

Since the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)¹ in 2015, state teams have been preparing their state plans aligned with ESSA for submission in April or September 2017 to the U.S. Department of Education. Because ESSA lands much of the decision-making and responsibility in education at the state and local levels, state education leaders are encouraged to develop plans that not only meet the requirements in the new law but that align with the state’s strategic vision to best meet the needs of all students. One of the major changes under the new law is that many of the standards, assessment, and accountability requirements that previously fell under Title III are now under Title I. For example, the assessment and accountability of English Learners (ELs) moved to Title I and must be included in the state’s overall accountability system. These changes afford states an opportunity to reflect on their vision for strengthening English learners’ achievement by considering their instruction and professional development strategies related to English learners as well as their goals for English proficiency as they craft an accountability system. This brief is intended to accompany the technical paper, [Incorporating English Learner Progress into State Accountability Systems](#) (Goldschmidt & Hakuta, 2017) to provide guidance to state teams about including ELs most effectively in their Title I accountability plan.

The technical paper serves four purposes:

1. It illustrates well-known facts about English language proficiency development that could be considered in the creation of an accountability plan.
2. It delivers a primer on how to model growth in English language proficiency, and the strengths and weaknesses of different options.
3. It demonstrates the implications of choosing a particular model based on strategy parameters associated with that decision, such as minimum *N*-size, or counting the number of years that former EL students are included in the EL subgroup.
4. It encourages states to test each model with their own current data, because different state contexts may impact outcomes.

The following is an overview of the technical paper that may be helpful in making decisions around ESSA Title I accountability plan related to ELs.

¹ All references to ESSA in this document are to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as amended by ESSA

CONTEXT OF YOUR STATE'S ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

States must contextualize the development of their Title I accountability plans as they communicate with stakeholder groups in order to give every EL learner the best opportunity possible for English language development and for academic achievement. This approach should include a model of how Title I accountability, Title III reporting, and other state accountability plans are tied together under the state goals to help systems improve all schools serving EL students.

Providing an equal educational opportunity for ELs and demonstrating the effectiveness of the approach taken to do so have been required under federal law since the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Lau v. Nichols* of 1974. Specifically, there are ten areas that must be considered to meet the needs of ELs. Among these areas, four topics overlap substantially with activities expected around Title I accountability for ELs: identification and assessment; language assistance programs; monitoring and exiting; and evaluating effectiveness. This area of the law applies to EL students regardless of whether or not they are receiving Title I funding. Funding through ESSA is not intended to supplant funding for these efforts, but instead to enhance them and encourage innovation. Thus, to the extent that accountability systems for Title I align with the goals the state has set for ELs, it can serve as a model for how to simultaneously meet legal requirements that go beyond students who receive ESSA funding. If your state has other laws or policies to support schools serving ELs, state policy should be consistent with ESSA in the accountability system so the state can target its assistance and employ the goals across different programs.

The following are some key elements to keep in mind in setting goals at the state level and writing the state accountability plan:

1. Maintain a consistent definition of ELs across your state, including entry and exit criteria. This is now required under Title III, and it is critical for ensuring consistent performance on the academic indicators across schools in different districts that may otherwise have different criteria.
2. Keep goals consistent with research about other sub-classifications of ELs within your state as well as within the reporting requirements of ESSA, such as recently-arrived English learners, long-term English learners, students with interrupted formal education, and EL students with disabilities, and reclassified former English learners.

3. Establish a realistic and evidence-based timeframe around which ELs are expected to attain English proficiency, as defined by your state English Language Proficiency Standards and demonstrated by data. Factors, such as grade level of initial entry, native language literacy, degree of English proficiency upon entry, family socioeconomic conditions, disability status, and type of program may impact this timeframe. Data from past years that reflects research should inform timeframes.
4. Pay attention to the schools with ELs in your state that would fall above or below the radar of Title I accountability because of *N*-size choices, as well as the distribution throughout the state with respect to different sub-populations of ELs, and consider how this would fit with your theory of action about supporting all ELs across your state.
5. Map the relationship between ELP status and academic performance in the content areas from existing data, and establish a theory of action that takes this relationship into account.
6. Develop a communication strategy for conveying changes in ESSA to state and local stakeholders, outlining implications for your theory of action (for example, how Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives from are now reconfigured in Title I and reported for schools, rather than for districts under the No Child Left Behind Act.)
7. Intentionally revise the state plan in the future based on learnings from the upcoming cycle as well as additional anticipated or unanticipated factors, such as anticipated change in assessments or standards, re-authorization, etc.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE TECHNICAL PAPER

The following are key takeaways from the technical paper that may be helpful in the decision-making process.

Pay attention to the known drivers of English Language Proficiency development in your model.

The figures in the beginning of the paper illustrate three important points about English Language Proficiency: (1) the trajectory of development is strongly driven by the student's initial English proficiency level and time in the system as an EL, (2) there is more rapid growth in the lower levels of proficiency that tapers off in the intermediate

to advanced levels – i.e., the growth is nonlinear, and (3) English language development drives academic content performance.

Because these drivers are unevenly distributed across schools, an undifferentiated set of growth expectations in ELP for groups of ELs with different characteristics may lead to unrealistically lower or higher expectations for some schools. A fair accountability model should take into account as many student background characteristics as possible.

Choose a growth model that makes sense in your state context and theory of action for ELs

The paper provides a tutorial for different models of growth that are commonly considered in accountability (Figure 7). One way to consider models is in terms of their measurement properties, somewhat akin to the introductory statistical notions of nominal, ordinal, and interval scales of measurement (nominal=counting frequency of instances of categories; ordinal=rank ordering individuals without attention to actual distance, as in percentiles; interval/ratio=constant scale of measurement across the range of scores). Value tables, growth percentiles, and value-added models can be ordered in terms of increasing statistical robustness, and may be pertinent to the state's theory of action for its accountability system. Careful consideration of the meaning of growth, how growth is measured, and how these factors relate to the state's theory of action should influence the choice of models. The rationale for the selection of the model should be as transparent as possible to stakeholder.

As the paper states, states should choose a model that allows student background characteristics (and therefore expected growth trajectory) to be taken into account, maximizing the amount of data utilized, strategies to attain reasonable stability in year-to-year results, and increasing the number of schools (and students) included in the accountability system by lowering the minimum *N*-size (short of violating student data privacy), as well as by including exited ELs in the EL subgroup for academic achievement.

Finally, states may consider using the same ELP growth model that is used for the academic assessment indicator by the state. Having different models for ELP than for academic assessment growth would send a signal about how the system views these two important elements of growth for EL students. The state should communicate their rationale within its theory of action as to why a selection of parallel or non-parallel models is made for ELP and academic content.

Choose a model that enables you to include as many schools with ELs while maintaining the stability of the model

The paper looks at the effect of selecting different minimum N -sizes on the number of schools with ELs that would be excluded from Title I accountability. The number of schools (and number of students) excluded as a result of selecting a particular minimum N -size is based on the demographic distribution of EL students in each state. Obviously, selecting a higher minimum N -size leads to higher percentages excluded; states should take this context into account when making decisions about their models.

The paper further examines strategies for increasing the N -size of EL students included in the accounting, such as using multiple years of data (which depends on the model adopted) and/or including exited EL students in academic assessments; this is allowed for up to four years under ESSA. The paper explores how states might address concerns that including exited EL students could potentially “mask” attention to the academic performance of ELs, since exited EL students by definition have higher academic content performance and thus would raise the average performance of the group. The “masking” effect is dependent on a number of local factors such as the mix of students and the performance of the English-Only (EO) group. Concerns about masking should further be weighed against the benefits of being able to include a larger number of schools in the overall accountability system. Finally, the impact of including exited students on growth in the content assessment shows higher growth for EL and exited students than for EO students. The impact of including exited students in the EL subgroup for growth is marginal and consistent with expectations from the research literature.

The paper runs stability estimates from year to year with different N -sizes, and models that directly measure growth are more consistent across different minimum N -sizes. In particular, the two-year gain score models and Student Growth Models should give confidence in year-to-year stability even as low as $N=10$.

Act with your own data: State context matters

A key message of the paper is that each state should model their data at home. Results from two different simulated states showed commonalities as well as striking differences between contexts. State context matters, as does the state’s theory of action around how to use the accountability system to improve results for English learners.



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