



## Transparency, Equity, & Accountability in the Minnesota ESSA Plan

This guide breaks down some of the most significant elements of Minnesota's ESSA plan, highlighting strengths and weaknesses, as well as concrete recommendations and areas to watch in the final plan. We hope that as you review the plan, attend MDE's public meetings, and submit a public comment, this guide can serve as a resource.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

Our big concerns are the flaws in the funnel system to identify schools for improvement, and the lack of a clear plan for public transparency.

#### Public Transparency

- ✘ One of the plan's most significant shortcomings is the lack of detail on how MDE will share key accountability metrics with the public. Formal accountability is important—in other words, identifying schools for state support—but communities and families also play a key role in driving improvement.

MDE should amend the plan to reflect a clear commitment to providing at-a-glance ratings for each category of indicators (proficiency, growth, graduation, English Learner outcomes, and school quality), along with an overall composite rating, accompanying the public data dashboard.

MDE should also specify that parents, students, and community members, particularly those from low-income communities and communities of color, will drive the development of the data dashboard.

#### School Identification

- ✘ MDE's proposed funnel system for identifying low-performing schools is a major weakness. It does not provide a sense of overall performance of all schools, misses an opportunity to identify high-performers, and distorts the weight of specific indicators, creating an all-or-nothing standard.

MDE should replace the funnel with a composite rating system, leading to better information on all schools, a more well-rounded approach to school identification, and increased transparency.

- If MDE does not replace the funnel, it should make a number of changes to the funneling process to raise the bar and avoid unintended consequences. MDE should 1) set absolute thresholds for identification, rather than relative thresholds; 2) when identifying schools with low student group performance, include those with performance worse than ANY school in the bottom five percent; 3) when identifying consistently underperforming schools, include schools that are performing poorly on *most* indicators rather than *all* indicators.



### School Support Exit Criteria

- ✘ The plan lacks meaningful criteria for determining whether (and how) a school identified for improvement should be exited from support. A school could actually decrease its proficiency and growth, but increase consistent attendance and be exited.

### Statewide Goals

- ✓ The plan sets ambitious goals that include third- and eighth-grade benchmarks.
- ✘ The plan's accountability metrics are not tied to goals.

### Ensuring All Students Count

- ✓ All student groups are equally weighted when calculating a school's overall performance (smaller groups are not hidden within averages).
- ✓ Schools are identified for support if they have specific student groups with low graduation rates, not just a low graduation rate overall.
- ✓ All students are counted in the denominator for accountability purposes. This will encourage meaningful participation in statewide assessments, and ensure that schools with low participation are not overlooked for support.

### Accountability Indicators

- ✘ MDE should use college enrollment and remediation rates as measures of college and career readiness. These measures reflect outcomes rather than inputs.
- ✘ MDE should provide the public a clear sense of how schools are helping students achieve proficiency, and encourage them to support students at all levels.
  - Rather than measuring only whether schools push students above the proficiency threshold, MDE should include an indicator that measures the percentage of students partially proficient or above, and one that measures the percentage of students exceeding standards. This mirrors MDE's approach to graduation, where schools will be measured based on both four-year and seven-year graduation rates.
  - If MDE adopts an alternate approach (a proficiency index), schools should get credit for students exceeding standards in addition to those partially meeting standards.

### SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

- ✓ The plan uses evidence-based interventions.
- ✘ The plan lacks a clear process for formally evaluating the impact of the Regional Centers of Excellence.

### TEACHER QUALITY

- ✓ The plan ties the definition of an ineffective teacher to the evaluation process.
- ✓ The plan ensures that out-of-state teaching experience is valued.

WATCH LIST: The "ineffective teacher" category should be meaningful and related to job performance, and should *not* be applied to teachers based solely on licensure status, as MDE considers the role of the state's new tiered system.