

# Every Student Succeeds Act

## Topic Discussion Guide

*Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Ohio will create a plan to better align our local, state and federal programs to help all of our students be successful.*

*The Ohio Department of Education is committed to meaningfully engaging a diverse group of stakeholders through a variety of methods and opportunities to solicit thoughts, opinions and recommendations concerning provisions in Ohio's state plan. Everyone's input is required to create a plan that is deeply rooted in the needs of Ohio's students.*

*Ohio is conducting a series of topic-specific webinars. Each topic will have a detailed discussion guide. The second topic, "Nationally Recognized High School Academic Assessment," is discussed below.*

## Nationally Recognized High School Academic Assessment

### WHAT IS A NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED HIGH SCHOOL ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT?

A nationally recognized high school academic assessment, as defined by proposed federal regulations, is "an assessment of high school students' knowledge and skills that is administered in multiple states and is recognized by institutions of higher education in those or other states for the purposes of entrance or placement into courses in postsecondary education or training programs." Examples of nationally recognized assessments based on this definition include the SAT, ACT, PARCC and Smarter Balanced and appear to include the International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement exams. The proposed regulations make it clear that the selected test must be used for all high school students in the district except for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are assessed on an alternate assessment. In addition, it would require the state to ensure that the use of appropriate accommodations, as determined by the individualized education program (IEP) or 504 plan team, does not deny a student with a disability or an English language learner the opportunity to participate in the assessment.

### WHAT DOES ESSA REQUIRE?

ESSA continues to require states to assess students in mathematics and English/language arts once in grades 9-12 and science once in grades 10-12. The proposed regulations give states the choice to approve school districts to administer nationally recognized high school academic assessments in place of state-designed high school assessments. Such assessment results would be used in the statewide accountability system. If states choose to allow local districts to do this, states are required to establish technical criteria for how they will determine if locally selected, nationally recognized assessments meet the requirements necessary for them to be approved. To be approved, locally selected assessments must:

- 1) Be aligned to and address the breadth and depth of the state's academic content standards;
- 2) Be equivalent in content coverage, difficulty and quality to the statewide assessments;
- 3) Provide comparable, valid and reliable data on student academic achievement as compared to the statewide assessments for all students and for each subgroup of students (ESSA section 1111(b)(2)(B));
- 4) Provide students in special education and English language learners the accommodations needed so that these students are not denied the opportunities to participate in the assessments and from any of the benefits from the participation in the assessments;

- 5) Meet the criteria for technical quality that all statewide assessments must meet under Title I; and
- 6) Provide unbiased, rational and consistent differentiation among schools within the state's accountability system.

If this flexibility is provided, it is left to districts to select and validate the nationally recognized assessments that meet the technical requirements set by the state, including passing the federal peer review process. To pass peer review, states and districts must show how the assessment provides valid inferences, is consistent with content standards, was legally authorized, provides a mechanism to review work being done and is available to each student. Local districts submit the materials necessary for the state to submit for federal peer review approval. If the state approves a local district's request and it passes peer review, then the assessment that was approved may be used by other districts without having to go through the same approval process. School districts must notify parents about their requests to use the locally selected assessments. Additionally, proposed regulations add to the requirement for local schools to notify parents of how they can provide input and of any effects on their instructional programs.

Proposed regulations require that a district also must use the selected assessment for all students in the district except for the students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are assessed on an alternate assessment, aligned with alternate achievement standards. The state may establish further requirements beyond those listed above that were outlined in the statute. Also, all students, including those with disabilities and English language learners, must be provided with the accommodations they need for any tests taken during the school day for accountability purposes. Local schools also must give opportunities for consultation with public charter schools whose students would be included in the assessments. If the local school is a public charter/community school, then it must assure that the use of the assessment is consistent with state charter school law and that it has consulted with the authorized public chartering agency.

## **HOW ARE STATE HIGH SCHOOL ASSESSMENTS CURRENTLY ADDRESSED?**

In Ohio, students take end-of-course exams in Algebra I and Geometry or Integrated Math I and II, Biology, American History and American Government, and English I and II. Students also take the ACT or SAT in the spring of their junior years. In addition, students may opt to take the WorkKeys assessment.

Students have three pathways to graduation to demonstrate readiness for graduation. A student needs to meet one of the following to graduate with an Ohio high school diploma:

- 1) Earn a cumulative number of 18 graduation points on the available end-of-course exams;
- 2) Earn an industry-recognized credential and score a 13 on WorkKeys; or
- 3) Earn a remediation-free score on either the ACT or SAT in English/language arts and mathematics.

## **WHAT IS THE POTENTIAL FLEXIBILITY AND SUBSEQUENT IMPLICATIONS?**

Ohio must continue to assess students in math, English language arts and science at the high school level with a common system of assessments. In context of this ESSA flexibility, Ohio may either:

- 1) Maintain its current system; or
- 2) Create a technical process by which nationally recognized high school academic assessments could be used in lieu of math and English language arts end-of-course assessments. (Science would still likely be an end-of-course assessment.) If an assessment is approved, it would be a district-by-district decision. The nationally recognized high school academic assessment would be used as equivalent achievement measures on school and district report cards.

If a state decides to allow local districts to apply for flexibility, it must accept the locally selected tests unless the tests do not meet the criteria established by the state. The state will need to set review requirements to determine if these locally selected tests meet the necessary criteria to balance its interest in administering fewer tests with its interest in having high-quality tests.

Some of the benefits of allowing this flexibility include:

- Students may have to take fewer tests;
- Districts may have to administer fewer tests;
- Fewer instructional days are lost to testing; and
- The state already covers the cost of one administration of the ACT/SAT in the spring of the junior year.

Some of the challenges to this flexibility include:

- Accommodations made for students with disabilities or English language learners could conflict with the policies of the vendors of the nationally recognized assessments. Vendors must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, while schools must comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which do not align completely. It is not guaranteed that vendor assessments can meet the accommodation requirements;
- Districts will likely be responsible for paying for all retakes (beyond Ohio's one statewide administration of the ACT/SAT), as well as full costs of any other assessments that might be approved;
- All locally selected tests must align with the academic content standards and be consistent with the academic achievement levels set for the state tests, including for all subgroups;
- Reduction in the number of pathway options students have for graduation for districts that select the nationally recognized high school academic assessment option;
- Must be an assurance that the nationally recognized high school academic assessments could be used in place of the state tests for accountability purposes and that schools are being assessed equitably. Assessments such as the ACT and SAT were not designed to be used in state accountability systems, and this means they will not automatically translate to fulfill the purposes of the current state tests. All approved forms will need to be equated and applied in the relevant measures of the report card. For example, if the ACT or SAT are approved, standard setting would be required to determine five equivalent performance levels, and statistically, "proficient on the ACT or SAT" would be equal to "proficient on [the] relevant end-of-course exam" and used accordingly in accountability measures;
- Equity and access to test preparation services provided by external vendors may be dependent on families' resources;
- Current nationally recognized tests do not allow input or state educator involvement in the development and review of the tests; and
- Policies in handling student mobility if students move to districts with different locally selected or approved tests.