

A new document presented by  
**The National Task Force  
on Assessment Education**



ESSA and Assessment Literacy: Serving the Education Ecosystem

# The ESSA Opportunity For Assessment Literacy



The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides states and districts an opportunity to strengthen the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that stakeholders in the education ecosystem are assessment literate. By explicitly incorporating training and professional development that supports assessment literacy into state ESSA applications, states can enhance student learning by leveraging funds to develop assessment policies and systems that are in balance and reflect quality assessment practices.

## ASSESSMENT LITERACY IS CRITICAL FOR IMPROVING STUDENT LEARNING

- **Assessment serves an instructional role:** The role of assessment must be expanded to serve as a teaching and learning tool used in the service of greater and broader student learning success. Schools can use quality assessment practices to help overcome inequities, narrow achievement gaps, promote universal high school graduation, help struggling learners find their own success, ensure digital competence and make sure all students are ready for college or workplace training.
- **Which means understanding sound assessment practice:** Assessment is the process of gathering information about student learning to inform instructional decisions. Although assessment is often used to certify learning, policy makers and school leaders must embrace the need for balanced assessment systems that also meet the information needs of those who use assessment to support student learning. All involved, from the classroom to the boardroom, must develop an understanding of the principles of sound assessment practice; they must be assessment literate.
- **Especially for teachers and school leaders:** Teachers need the opportunity to learn how to use assessment during learning to help all students remain confident, successful learners who believe in themselves. Research has verified the powerful impact sound classroom assessment practices can have on student learning success; but few teachers and even fewer principals have been given the opportunity to become assessment literate. Professional development programs are readily and inexpensively available to develop assessment literacy. Assessment literate teachers and school leaders are essential to greater and broader student learning.

States can use flexibility within ESSA to ensure that students, parents, teachers, school leaders, and school districts develop an understanding of the principles and practices of sound assessment, supporting student learning by becoming assessment literate.

## ASSESSMENT LITERACY FOR THE EDUCATION ECOSYSTEM UNDER ESSA

### FOR STATE AND LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES (SEAS AND LEAS)

Eliminating redundant or unnecessary tests and improving assessment programs is supported in ESSA through a grant program that provides for audits of testing systems at both the state and local levels. Such assessment audits will support student learning only if the auditors and the recipients of the audit understand how assessment practices can support greater and broader student learning success. States should identify resources and opportunities within the assessment audit process to improve assessment literacy.

#### ESSA Opportunities for SEAs and LEAs: Title I, Part B

**SEAs could ensure** assessment audits are conducted and used to benefit students by supporting training in the role, purpose, users and uses of various types of assessments.

**SEAs could support** the identification and development of state and district personnel with assessment literacy credentials to oversee the assessment audit, act on the results, and develop an assessment plan.

**SEAs could require** that staff hired to support assessment development, selection, and use be assessment literate or credentialed in assessment.

**SEAs could support** LEAs engaging all affected stakeholders in the development of district level assessment policies and practices.

**SEAs could provide** training, technical assistance, and capacity-building in LEAs to assist teachers, principals, or other school leaders with selecting and implementing assessments, designing classroom-based assessments and using data from such assessments to improve instruction and student academic achievement.

### FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

When teachers and school leaders are assessment literate, they effectively use assessments to identify student strengths and weaknesses and use that information to individualize learning experiences and spend precious time focusing classroom instruction on what students are ready to learn rather than on concepts they already understand. State education agencies (SEAs) need to be aware that good assessment literacy among teachers and school leaders may provide the most leverage to influence the complex endeavor of school improvement.

#### ESSA Opportunities for Teachers and School Leaders: Title II, Part A

**SEAs could collaborate** with LEAs to provide professional learning opportunities to teachers and school leaders to support assessment literacy, specifically in relation to the best use of assessment practices designed to promote student learning at the classroom level. This could also involve supporting professional learning communities of teachers and school leaders focused on designing classroom-based assessments aligned with local curriculum and standards.

**SEAs could work** with LEAs to identify and implement innovative scheduling options that would provide additional time during the school day for teachers to analyze student work and assessment data, and provide formative feedback that serves to advance student learning and motivate students to learn.

**SEAs could incorporate** assessment literacy into the design and implementation of mentorship and induction programs, ensuring that incoming teachers will be prepared to use sound assessment practices to improve student learning.

## FOR PARENTS

ESSA embeds improvements in family engagement and capacity building to meaningfully engage parents in their children's educations. When parents understand the purpose of assessments and can interpret the results, they have better tools to advocate for the needs of their students and their schools. Knowledge, involvement, and advocacy is essential for parents to support better educational opportunities for all students through assessment literate educators, school leaders, and stakeholders.

### ESSA Opportunity for Parents : Title I, Part A

**SEAs could require** LEAs to include a plan for supporting assessment literacy for parents, strengthening the partnership between families, school and community to improve student outcomes in the required parent and family engagement policy.

**SEAs could support** assessment literacy for parents by suggesting LEAs address the role, purpose, users and uses of assessments in the required annual meeting with parents and families.

**SEAs could support** assessment literacy for parents by suggesting LEAs use a portion of the funds reserved for parent and family engagement activities to inform parents about the role, purpose, users and uses of assessments.

## FOR STUDENTS

When students understand the purpose of assessments and can interpret the results, they become partners in meeting their learning goals and can use more than just traditional assessment to demonstrate their learning. As a result, students become more engaged in their learning. Assessment literacy creates opportunities for students to experience more personalized learning, learn more in less time and show what they know.

### ESSA Opportunities for Students: Title II, Parts A and B

**SEAs could support** professional development that assists teachers with skillful use of the formative assessment process; selecting and designing classroom-based assessments, and using data from such assessments to improve instruction and student academic achievement.

**SEAs could support** teachers' in helping their students understand the meaning and use of a variety of assessments, from large-scale achievement testing to classroom-based assessments. This will enable teachers to enlist students as assessment-literate partners in their own education.

**SEAs could support** teachers usage of valid and reliable screening assessments, diagnostic assessments, formative assessment processes, and summative assessments to identify a child's learning needs, to inform instruction, and in partnership with the child, monitor progress and the effects of instruction.

## ENGAGING AROUND THESE ESSA OPPORTUNITIES

Development of assessment literate teachers, students, parents and school leaders is essential to support student learning. By explicitly incorporating language around assessment audits, training for teachers and school leaders that develops sound assessment practices, hiring of personnel with assessment certifications, and parental engagement through assessment literacy into state ESSA applications, states can enhance student learning by leveraging funds to develop assessment policies and systems that reflect balanced and quality practices.

## SAMPLE LANGUAGE FOR STATE ESSA APPLICATIONS

*Language that explicitly encourages districts to use available funds to support assessment literacy development for teachers, students, parents and stakeholders in instructional and school improvement efforts can increase the quality of teaching and learning. Below is sample language states might consider during their ESSA planning.*

Assessment Literacy development can help the State and its LEAs meet the goals of ESSA by maximizing instructional time, engaging students in their learning and building stronger partnerships with stakeholders. Ensuring that educators engaged in conducting and using assessment audits are assessment literate will result in district assessment systems (policies and practices) that are comprehensive, quality and balanced. Assessment systems meeting these characteristics support student learning and effective professional practice of the educators who comprise the system.

For these reasons the State encourages districts to consider including assessment audits and assessment literacy development into instructional and school improvement efforts.

*If **school leaders** understand sound assessment practice,  
then they can make sound curriculum and instructional decisions.*

*If a **teacher** understands sound assessment practice  
then they are able to meet the diverse needs of all students.*

*If an **assessment system** motivates all students to achieve success,  
then school improvement will occur.*

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) supports the development and use of the *ESSA and Assessment Literacy: Serving the Education Ecosystem*. NWEA convenes the Task Force.

