



ESSA Demands A New Approach: Balanced Assessments

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One of the goals of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is to put power back in the hands of schools and districts. Within their state accountability systems, states may evaluate students through “a single summative assessment or through *multiple statewide interim assessments during the academic year that result in a single summative score* that provides valid, reliable, and transparent information on student achievement or growth.”

Though there are many ways to evaluate complex and detailed school accountability plans, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute evaluates all 51 ESSA plans against the following three primary criteria¹:

- Assigns annual ratings to schools that are clear and intuitive
- Encourages schools to focus on all students, not just low performers
- Measures all schools fairly, including those with high rates of poverty

We believe a balanced interim assessment approach is part of effective accountability. Such an approach uses adaptive tests that are grade-level independent to measure current ability and advances over time (i.e., how much have they grown?) plus fixed-form, on-grade tests that concretely measure whether students have proficiency in a specific set of knowledge (i.e., do they understand this grade-level standard *today?*). By balancing these two types of assessment (growth and proficiency), states, district, and schools can meet and exceed the criteria above.

Consistent interim testing across the schools in a state or district, using the same scales and the same testing mechanisms, helps promote fairness and clarity regardless of the socioeconomic status of the school. By using a balanced system that includes both types of measures (growth and on-grade proficiency), states and districts can more easily measure schools fairly. In addition, evaluating measures beyond grade-level proficiency encourages a focus on all students throughout the year, not just those students “on the bubble”—falling near an annual proficiency target.

Our students, educators, and parents deserve assessment results that inform instruction and easily lead to an effective measure of accountability. A balanced assessment system is the best way to achieve that goal. That’s why Scantron developed Ascensus, a balanced assessment solution that provides multiple assessment metrics to highlight a holistic view of student, school, and district performance and to ensure a fair and accurate approach to your accountability program.

Ascensus provides access to both types of tests in a single platform. Students see a consistent test delivery, regardless of whether they are taking a computer-adaptive or fixed-form test. Teachers get immediate results in reports that connect scores directly to educational standards all the way down to the individual skill—deeper than any

other interim-level assessment system. Administrators get reports they can use to aggregate and disaggregate results, making it easy to gauge accountability against their state’s college and career-ready standards.

Scantron’s commitment to providing deep connections to not only standards and strands but also to the specific skills within them brings two main benefits: The first is a reduction in testing. Rather than having to use multiple tests from multiple providers multiple times a year—say, one to satisfy standards reporting and a different one to provide detailed results to teachers for instructional adjustment—districts can administer Ascensus growth only three times a year (typically Fall, Winter, Spring). Those three administrations provide an initial benchmark, progress against goals, and a year-end check.

The second is results that are meaningful to *both* administrators and teachers. Administrators can use the results to see average scores for the district, different schools, different teachers, and different subjects. They can disaggregate by student demographics, participation in school programs, and more. Reports are clear and easy to read, so they can connect results to state ratings intuitively. Teachers can examine results for their classes or for individual students. They can see exactly which standards were attained and which need more work, and they can even view recommendations for specific skills that need additional focus.

Using these results, they can design remediation or intervention for low-performing students, develop challenging enrichment for high-performing students, and keep those students who are on target moving forward. Teachers can create study groups based on specific skills and even create individualized learning paths.

Ascensus provides the best of both worlds: long-term reliability from a leader in educational assessment since 1972 and a modern interface supporting the extended features educators in 2018 have come to expect. Ascensus supports a wide range of item types, from traditional types like multiple choice or fill-in-the-blank to technology-enabled items that include interactivity like drag-and-drop matching or clickable hotspots. Students have access to more in-test tools at the district’s discretion, such as rulers, protractors, and calculators.

Further, we’ve enhanced and expanded accommodations to support students with special needs. And we’ve increased the options for testing security, such as a secure browser for student testing and lockable item banks and tests for high-stakes testing, so districts can control who sees the items and tests ahead of time.

We believe that this new solution, developed from the ground up to support ESSA accountability requirements, provides states, districts, principals, and students with more data from less testing.

Learn more at www.scantron.com/ascensus

¹ *Rating the Ratings: An Analysis of the 51 ESSA Accountability Plans*, Wright B.L. & Petrilli M.J., Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, November 2017.