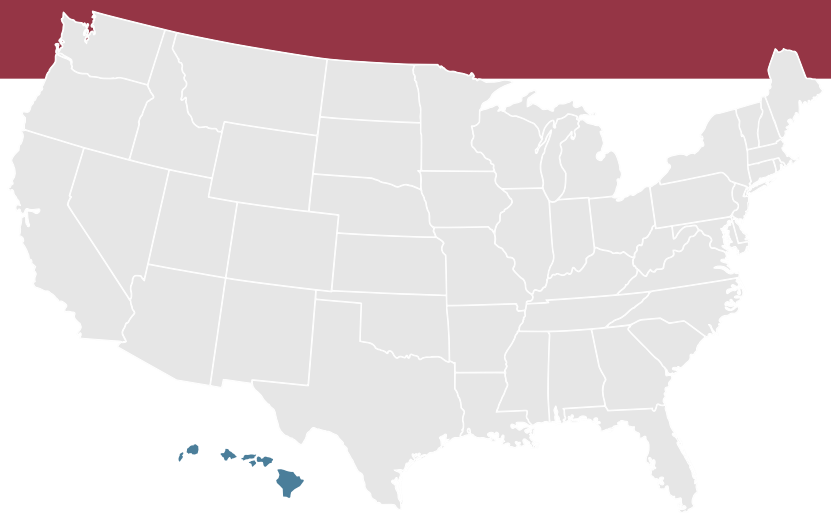


An Independent Review of ESSA State Plans



Hawaii

Project Overview

Bellwether Education Partners, in partnership with the Collaborative for Student Success, convened an objective, independent panel of accountability experts to review ESSA state plans. We sought out a diverse group of peer reviewers with a range of political viewpoints and backgrounds, and we asked them to review each state's accountability plan with an eye toward capturing strengths and weaknesses.

We aimed to provide constructive feedback to the states, and to serve as a source of straightforward information to the public so that they are better able to engage policymakers if and how they see fit. Inherently, this independent process could not take into account the numerous political and situational challenges that occur in every state. We are in no way attempting to diminish those challenges, but the scope of this review was to compare the rigor and comprehensive nature of state accountability plans.

Peers worked in small teams to review the plans that states formally submitted to the U.S. Department of Education. After reviewing independently, the peers met for two days to discuss their individual reviews and work together on the collaborative draft you'll see below. The teams were asked to use their discretion and expertise to respond to and score each rubric item, and those scores were normed across states and peers.

Each state was given the opportunity to review the draft peer analysis and to provide substantive additions and corrections. Still, the reviews should be considered a snapshot of state plans as of September–November 2017, and we anticipate that states will continue to update their plans going forward.

To read more about the project, as well as a list of the expert peer reviewers, visit the Bellwether website [here](#).

Overall Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths: What are the most promising aspects of the state’s plan? What parts are worth emulating by other states?

As an early adopter of the Common Core state standards and assessments, Hawaii has had aligned standards and assessments for several years. This consistency has allowed the state to collect accurate and robust data that it can use to make decisions. In addition, the Hawaiian-language assessment is promising; however, students to whom it applies need to be fully incorporated into the accountability system.

For small schools not meeting the minimum group size requirements, Hawaii proposes the use of multiyear pooling for up to three years to represent students’ results at the school. Moreover, the state’s accountability system places significant weight on academic achievement and growth, incentivizing schools to pay attention to both equally in elementary and middle schools.

For schools identified in need of support and improvement, Hawaii articulates a plan for multi-tiered support. This system involves all state and local actors and details how they should be involved depending on the level of need. In addition, the state is still developing components of the support system and would like to staff a professional to oversee the support system to ensure smooth implementation and wise resource use. This system has the potential to drive improvement.

Weaknesses: What are the most pressing areas for the state to improve in its plan? What aspects should other states avoid?

Hawaii should clarify alignment between multiple visions and goals for public education. The multiple systems in the state, including the Blueprint for Education, Strive HI, several strategic plans, and ESSA accountability reporting, could cause confusion among stakeholders.

Hawaii has set an aggressive goal of reducing non-proficient rates by 50 percent; however, the ESSA accountability model does not clearly align with or incentivize this goal. Moreover, Hawaii meets the minimum bar to create strong systems that ensure subgroups of students get the attention needed to improve, but does not articulate how it will meet the particular needs of struggling students in the state.

The state has a relative system for ranking schools to be identified for school support. The same is true for how these schools exit the state’s school support identification. These systems make it nearly impossible to tell if a school has actually improved or if it’s simply doing better than other struggling schools. Hawaii should consider objective measures to hold schools accountable and strengthen exit criteria or include more detail.

Finally, many areas in Hawaii’s plan are still under development. Given that schools will be identified for improvement starting in 2017-18, Hawaii should strive to clarify these areas for schools and the public prior to identification.

Plan Components

Each state’s plan has been rated on a scale of 1 (“This practice should be avoided by other states”) to 5 (“This could be a potential model for other states”).

Goals: Are the state’s vision, goals, and interim targets aligned, ambitious, and attainable? Why or why not?



Hawaii sets forth an ambitious vision of being “acknowledged as having the nation’s top public education system in 2025.” The state also has a P-20 campaign to achieve the goal of 55 percent of working-age Hawaii adults having a college degree by 2025—“55 by 25.” In its ESSA plan, the state does not mention how many working-age adults in the state currently have a college degree. Hawaii should provide more context to prove why 55 percent is a reasonable goal.

To reach this vision, Hawaii establishes a goal of reducing the percent of students who do not reach proficiency by half, including subgroups of students. This is an ambitious goal, but nine years may be too long to reach it. The state plan says Hawaii leaders will use the first three years for “designing, training, piloting, and measuring the impact of new instructional programs followed by six years of full implementation.” At the end of the nine-year period, only 76 percent of all students will be proficient in reading and only 71 percent in math.

Hawaii’s graduation rate goal is 90 percent for all subgroups of students by 2025. While this is ambitious given current performance levels, the state presents no historical data to justify that the goal is attainable. The state weighs graduation rate at an alarmingly high percentage of high schools’ overall scores: 50 percent, which may be tied to the goal of achieving 55 percent of working-age Hawaii adults having a college degree by 2025. Given Hawaii’s overall vision, the state may consider lowering the weight of high school graduation in its accountability system and adding a college and career indicator.

Hawaii aims to increase the percentage of English learners making progress in achieving English language proficiency to 75 percent. While ambitious, the plan provides no evidence that the targets are attainable. It is not clear that meeting any of these goals will help Hawaii achieve its vision of being the top public education system, or even its “55 by 25” goal.

Standards and Assessments: Is the state’s accountability system built on high-quality standards and assessments aligned to college and career readiness? Why or why not?

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Hawaii adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2010 and began implementation of the “Hawaii Common Core Standards” in the 2013-14 school year. Hawaii’s assessment for grades 3-8 and grade 11 is the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA). This consistency provides Hawaii with a solid baseline and a robust dataset, allowing the state to strengthen its connection to the higher education system. In addition, the state’s higher education system endorsed Smarter Balanced as a college- and career-readiness test, allowing the use of student scores as a measure to determine if a student is ready for credit-bearing coursework in the state’s colleges and universities.

However, there are concerns with how Hawaii will assess students enrolled in Ka Papahana Kaiapuni, the Hawaiian-language immersion program. For these students, Hawaii administers the Kaiapuni Assessment for Educational Outcomes (KAEO), a standards-based assessment in the Hawaiian language. Hawaii will seek a waiver from the reporting requirements for students who took the KAEO field test so that students do not need to take both KAEO and SBA in spring 2018. It is critical that Hawaii have comparability studies completed between SBA and KAEO assessments to ensure the validity and rigor of the KAEO assessments.

Hawaii also does not present the link between graduation rate and success in postsecondary entry-level courses. Without this link, it is unclear if the assessments, standards, and measures of the ESSA plan align to the state’s “55 by 25” vision. Finally, the state could strengthen its plan by providing more information about its alternate achievement standards and aligned assessments for students with the most severe cognitive disabilities and ensuring that it has a process in place to meet the 1 percent cap on alternate assessments for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Indicators: Are the state’s chosen accountability indicators aligned to ensure targets and goals are met and likely to lead to improved educational outcomes for students? Why or why not?

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Hawaii has chosen a simple list of high-quality indicators to include in its accountability system (academic achievement as measured by language arts and mathematics proficiency, academic progress as measured by median Student Growth Percentile, graduation rate, progress in achieving English language proficiency, and school quality/student success as measured by chronic absenteeism rates). However, the plan doesn’t do enough to tie these indicators to its targets and goals. For example, the state has a goal of reducing non-proficient

students by 50 percent; however, the indicators in the accountability system do not seem to incentivize performance on this measure. The state reports a school unit score, but the scores are utilized primarily for identification of lowest-performing schools and not used to incentivize progress toward reducing non-proficiency gaps.

In addition to the indicators used for formal school-rating purposes, Hawaii has articulated another set of measures that it will track in the state’s school accountability and performance reporting system called “Strive HI.” Strive HI will focus on providing information about each school’s progress on the state’s “Strategic Plan Student Success Indicators” and ESSA-required indicators. The Strive HI School Report will be a comprehensive report on school performance. These annual public reports will provide information on schools’ progress on the Strategic Plan indicators and federally required indicators, based on common statewide measures as well as locally selected measures, to provide a more comprehensive picture of each school. This has the potential to be confusing for the public, as the indicators are not fully aligned to the overall vision of becoming the top education system in the nation by 2025 and the goal of 55 by 25.

Moreover, some of the Strive HI indicators would be more appropriate for the state’s accountability system. For example, Strive HI lists as measures 3rd-grade readiness, 9th grade on track, achievement gaps, career and technical education concentrators, college-going rate, and local measures. These measures are not included in the ESSA plan; however, many of them would appear to be more aligned to the Hawaii strategic plan and vision than the chronic absence measure included in the ESSA school quality measure. In addition, Hawaii does not include a college- and career-readiness indicator in its system, which is another missed opportunity to align its system to its statewide goals.

Academic Progress: Has the state created sufficient incentives for schools to care about both student proficiency and student growth over time? Why or why not?



In schools serving grades 3-8, academic achievement and growth account for 40 percent each of a school’s rating, or 80 percent total. These significant weights place incentives on schools to care a lot—and equally—about achievement and growth. In high schools, achievement is weighted at 30 percent and graduation is weighted at 50 percent. There are no growth measures at the high school level. The alarmingly high weight given to graduation rate may mask achievement in high schools’ ratings. It also conflicts with the state’s college- and career-ready goals and vision—the state’s large weight on graduation places incentive on high schools to produce a higher percentage of diplomas awarded. Instead, more of a balance with an achievement measure at the high school level would drive quality in the graduation goal.

Hawaii's growth model, called the median student growth percentile, compares the progress students make against their similarly performing peers and converts those scores into percentiles. While this approach is relatively simple to calculate and interpret, it does not ensure students cover the content they need to master to stay on track toward mastery at graduation. Hawaii deserves credit for pairing this type of growth model with a clean measure of achievement, but placing such a strong weight on median student growth percentile scores could dilute the benefits of having strong state standards if they play a smaller part in school ratings.

Hawaii will measure students' growth in English language proficiency relative to a standard. This is a calculation based on student performance on the WIDA ACCESS measure and calculates current performance and growth toward exit status within a maximum of five years.

All Students: Does the state system mask the performance of some subgroups of students, or does it have adequate checks in place to ensure all students (including all subgroups of students) receive a high-quality education? Why or why not?

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Hawaii has met the minimum bar for all students according to the letter of the law, but has done little to go above it. The state is using a minimum group size of 20 students for accountability and reporting purposes. For schools who do not have group sizes of at least 20 for subgroup populations, Hawaii will pool data for up to three years. This approach ensures a high percentage of schools and subgroups from each school will be reported and accountable. However, a couple of factors could skew the numbers.

It is unclear how the KAEO student subgroup is included in accountability indicators. While Hawaii is in the early stages of assessment development and accountability for this subgroup, it could represent up to 26 percent of the state's population and greatly impact overall performance of schools and the state if this subgroup is not included in calculations.

On a positive note, Hawaii is assigning non-proficient status to any student who is not assessed that causes a school or subgroup to perform below the 95 percent assessed requirement. This could substantially lower a school or subgroup's academic achievement indicator.

Identifying Schools: Is the state’s plan to identify schools for comprehensive and targeted support likely to identify the schools and student groups most in need?

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Hawaii meets the federal requirements of identifying the lowest-performing 5 percent of Title I schools for comprehensive support; however, failure to include all schools in the analysis may prohibit Hawaii from identifying low-performing schools who are not included in Title I calculations. The state will also identify high schools that do not reach at least a 67 percent graduation rate as low-performing schools.

For targeted support, the state says that it still needs to determine the threshold for underperformance for each grade span to identify consistently underperforming subgroups. From there, it will identify the schools with at least one subgroup with a subgroup performance score below this state-determined threshold. The fact that Hawaii doesn’t yet have the threshold determined is problematic and makes it difficult to analyze.

Given that Hawaii will not include KAEO students in ESSA accountability measures, this may prevent some schools from being identified as low performing.

Supporting Schools: Are the state’s planned interventions in comprehensive and targeted support schools evidence-based and sufficiently rigorous to match the challenges those schools face? Why or why not?

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Hawaii articulates a fairly generic, process-oriented multitiered system of supports for schools in need of improvement. Struggling schools will receive support from the state and the regional complex (feeder system). Hawaii is proposing to designate full-time federal program support staff to focus on coordinating the school improvement efforts supported by Title I and school improvement funds for schools identified for support and improvement. This could go a long way in ensuring that support initiatives are implemented and resources are used wisely.

Hawaii separates its level of supports into three tiers: program supports, comprehensive and targeted supports, and rigorous interventions. These levels of supports should help to focus interventions and resources to the particular needs of schools. In addition, the plan articulates what the school, complex, and state should be doing at each tier.

The structures Hawaii details to support schools seem orderly and comprehensive, but the state could further explain some of its interventions. For example, for schools in the third tier in need of rigorous intervention, the state will create an “Equity Support Team” that will visit and “assess each school’s needs to determine the

supports needed, and address systemic issues that inhibit the implementation of school improvement plans.” From there, the Equity Support Team will provide more intensive supports to these schools. Hawaii should articulate what some of these supports could be. Moreover, the state could provide historical data to explain if turnaround strategies have proven to be effective in low-performing schools.

The state also does not provide detail on how it plans to use the 7 percent of federal funds intended for school improvement activities, including whether it will award those funds by formula or through a competitive process. Additionally, the state should indicate if and how it intends to provide direct student services using the optional 3 percent set-aside, which provides an additional opportunity for the state to align school improvement activities with its statewide goals.

Exiting Improvement Status: Are the state’s criteria for schools to exit comprehensive and targeted support status sufficient to demonstrate sustained improvements? Why or why not?



Hawaii’s plan to exit schools from comprehensive support and improvement is based on the criteria for which they were identified. Schools that were identified due to graduation rate must show improvement and must have a graduation rate greater than 67 percent in the final year of the three-year support and improvement period in order to exit. Schools identified for support due to low performance must have a school performance unit score placing them above the lowest-performing 5 percent of Title I schools within their grade span in the final school year of the three-year support and improvement period.

For schools identified for support due to persistently low-performing subgroups, the subgroups that led to the identification must have a subgroup performance score greater than the threshold score that led to their identification for additional targeted support in the final year of the three-year comprehensive support and improvement period. However, since Hawaii has not set the threshold by which it will identify schools, it is unclear how much improvement is necessary in order to exit this status. It is important for Hawaii to clearly communicate this to schools after the criteria has been established.

Also, Hawaii says schools must exhibit one additional measure. The School Improvement Committee is still developing these additional criteria. It is unclear if this additional requirement will promote sustained improvements. This could be a positive move compared to the other exit criteria.

As it stands, Hawaii’s system for exit is relative and not objective. To exit improvement status, it is possible that a school will not have to improve if another school performs worse, which may push underperforming schools out of identification despite the lack of changes. Moreover, the criteria seem insufficient to demonstrate sustained improvements. It is unclear what constitutes significant improvement and whether there needs to be a trend of improvement.

Continuous Improvement: Has the state outlined a clear plan to learn from its implementation efforts and modify its actions accordingly, including through continued consultation and engagement of key stakeholders? If not, what steps could the state take to do so?

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In developing its ESSA plan, it is clear that the Hawaii Department of Education convened numerous stakeholders for feedback on the proposed accountability framework. These stakeholders included district administrators, school principals through principal feedback sessions and principal meetings, teachers through the Teacher Leader Work Group workshops, and community organizations through a community outreach meeting.

In addition to its ESSA plan, Hawaii has a strategic plan that articulates many more measures the state will continue to monitor for progress. However, it is not clear how the state will utilize the annual review of ESSA programs and performance to identify areas for stakeholder involvement in improving the ESSA plan. Hawaii does list a number of components of the ESSA plan that are still under development and engaging stakeholders.