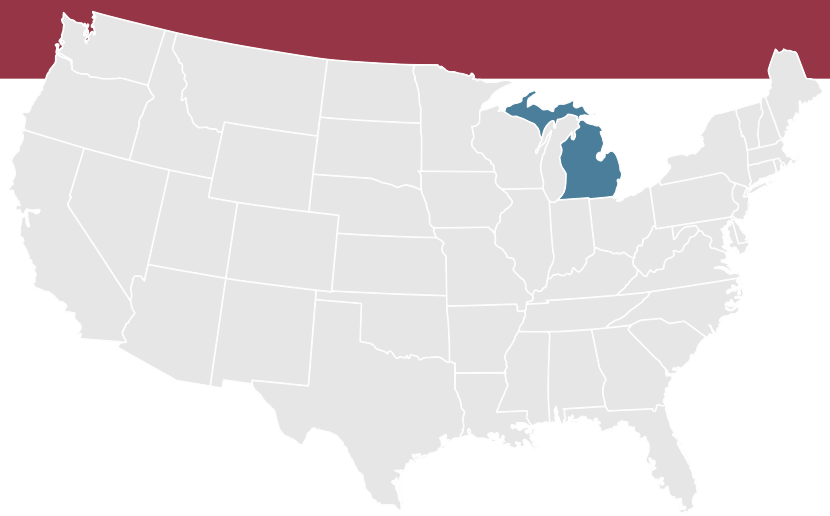


An Independent Review of ESSA State Plans



Michigan

Project Overview

In partnership with the Collaborative for Student Success, Bellwether Education Partners, 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 writing their own reviews 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 April–June 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 noted below, Michigan’s plan is far from complete, but the state deserves credit for attempting to measure a number of factors important to the state’s citizens. Michigan’s plan is notable for the inclusion of science and social studies assessments in the accountability system and an indicator that measures student time with fine arts, music, PE, and access to library specialists. It’s also provided a compelling mock-up of a sample school report card.

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

Michigan’s plan is incomplete and provides insufficient details to adequately review. It presents three potential accountability systems that it’s considering, but it hasn’t finalized its choice, and all three systems are underdeveloped. As presented, Michigan’s plan is missing key elements that are required in order for the state to receive federal education funding.

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?



Michigan has set an ambitious long-term strategy: It aims to be a top 10 education state in 10 years. However, the state does not provide sufficient context for this objective. It is unclear what it means to be a top 10 educational state and how the state will determine the other states among the top 10. The state commits to using data to drive resources and provide a focus for continuous improvement. It prioritizes reducing the impact of high-risk factors, and it seeks to provide a quality education to all students. Including these priorities as a part of the state’s long-term goals is appropriate.

However, Michigan’s specific interim targets may not be aligned to this long-term vision. It sets a goal of having 75 percent of schools and 75 percent of student subgroups reaching the 75th percentile rate in English, math, science, and social studies by the year 2024-25. Since the state does not include any data on past progress, there is no context to assess how these goals were established and whether they are ambitious and achievable.

Michigan’s 10-year strategy is an appropriate timeline. However, there is some question around the rigor and ambitiousness of this goal. In addition there is no direct link between the state’s 75-75-75 goal for all children and its stated goal of being among the top 10 states. Based on Michigan’s current data, less than half of students will be proficient in math in seven years. Furthermore, the plan does not break out its goals by students with disabilities, English learners, or any other subgroups, which ESSA requires.

In terms of making a next draft stronger, Michigan may consider better defining what top 10 means and how the state will improve all educational opportunities to reach this 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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Michigan’s plan is based on strong standards, as adopted by the state, though it does not provide much information about the alignment of its new assessments with the state’s standards and college and career readiness. As such, the rigor of Michigan’s standards and assessments is unclear.

The state should be commended for proposing to include science and social studies as part of its assessment portfolio.

While the second most common language other than English is Arabic, Michigan does not provide a state assessment in mathematics in Arabic. Instead, the state intends to provide on-the-spot Arabic translations for students taking the mathematics assessment. It is unclear if this is an effective strategy or if it could produce variation in assessment delivery. Michigan may consider continuing to engage stakeholders as the state considers adoption/improvement of future assessments. Lastly, Michigan should strengthen its plan by 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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Michigan’s indicators have promise and show innovation but lack clarity around the reasons for selection, research basis, and alignment to targets and goals—whether interim, long term, or systemic. The state has outlined the following indicators: academic achievement (in all four subjects), academic growth (in all four subjects), English-learner progress, graduation rate (four-, five-, and six-year cohort rates), and a final composite indicator made up of chronic absenteeism, time spent in fine arts, music, physical education, and access to library specialist, 11th- and 12th-grade advanced coursework, and high school postsecondary enrollment rates. Michigan’s idea to include science and social studies is positive and will help balance out concerns about curriculum narrowing.

But, while Michigan deserves credit for attempting to measure a number of factors important to the state’s citizens, it provides little information in its description of its indicators, and it provided no substantive detail about how these indicators are valid, reliable, backed by research, increase student learning, relate to postsecondary

outcomes, or meaningfully differentiate schools. In order to strengthen this section, the state could better describe how its chosen indicators will help the state achieve its goals, and specify how the state will measure each of these indicators. For example, the state intends to include time spent in fine arts, music, physical education, and access to a library media specialist, but the state does not provide an adequate explanation for how this indicator will be measured in a comparable fashion statewide.

Similarly, the indicator measuring postsecondary enrollment rate is promising and could be something to emulate if it can be effectively implemented. Unfortunately, there is very little detail to fully understand the indicator. The state's proposed weighting of the four-, five-, and six-year graduation rates is a potentially useful concept. However, its current structure assigns a 50 percent weight to extended-year graduation rates, and the state could strengthen its plan by emphasizing the four-year graduation rate with a more significant weight.

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?

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Michigan's plan proposes three potential accountability systems: An A-F rating system that combines measures into one overall rating for each school, an A-F rating system that reports component grades of each of six measures but does not compile those into one overall grade; or a "dashboard" that merely reports raw data but does not attempt to rate schools on any of the components or overall. Michigan states that all three of these options would include data on growth and proficiency, but only the first option would potentially meet ESSA's requirements that states use their academic indicators to identify schools in need of additional support.

Still, because Michigan has not settled on which of the three options it plans to pursue, it remains unclear if it would create sufficient incentives for schools to care about both proficiency and growth.

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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Michigan states that all three of these options would include subgroup data, but only the first option would meet ESSA’s requirements that states identify schools with low subgroup performance as in need of additional support. The state specifies that, under the first option, any valid subgroup meeting the state’s minimum group size of 30 students would be weighted equally as the all-students group.

Still, because Michigan has not settled on which of the options it plans to pursue, it is difficult to assess whether Michigan’s plan will support the educational needs of all student subgroups.

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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Michigan does offer a compelling mock-up of a sample school report card, but ESSA requires states to have their accountability plans in place for the 2017-18 school year, and Michigan’s statements make it seem unlikely it will be able to do so.

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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Although Michigan provided a bit of detail and rationale around the support provided to schools through existing state initiatives and structures, there are significant holes in how the interventions fit together. The plan lacks guidance on the use of evidence-based interventions and support, and there is no evidence provided demonstrating that state-designed efforts have had success in the past. The state does not involve itself directly in helping schools improve that are identified for comprehensive and targeted support and improvement (and, per above, the state has not identified how those schools would be identified). Finally, the state provides no explanation for how it will use its 7 percent of federal funds dedicated for school-improvement activities.

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?

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Michigan has not provided much of a methodology for identifying schools in need of comprehensive or targeted support, and its plan merely states “the school no longer is identified by the system...in no more than four years.” That would be long enough to show progress, especially for targeted support schools, but the state has not provided a definition for how much progress would be required.

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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Michigan conducted extensive outreach on its ESSA plan, but, given that the state has not settled on significant parts of its accountability system, that work appears to be far from finished. The state should consider how it plans to complete that process through ongoing stakeholder engagement as it makes decisions on which indicators to include, how to combine those indicators, and the actions that must follow in low-performing schools.