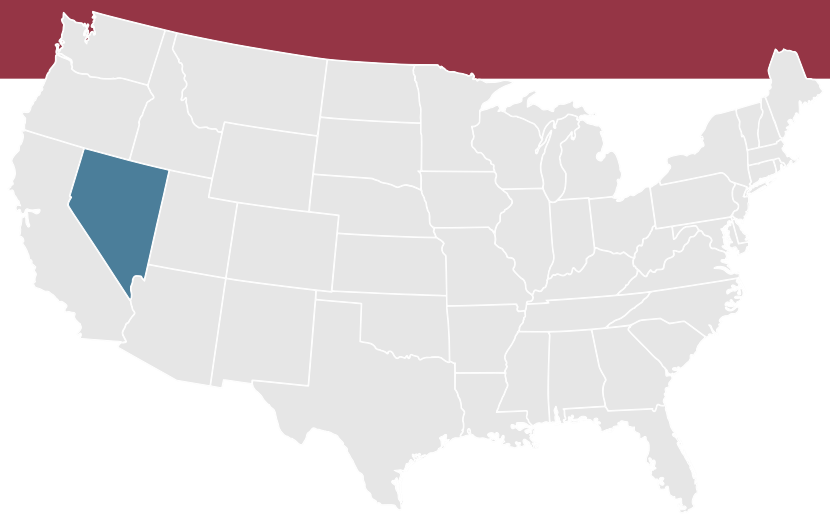


An Independent Review of ESSA State Plans



Nevada

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?

Nevada has built its accountability system on high-quality standards and assessments that are aligned to college and careers, and the state’s accountability framework is based on ambitious goals and interim targets. The system is also attempting to strike a balance between student proficiency and growth over time, and has embedded both priorities into its school-rating system. Nevada’s use of chronic absenteeism, school climate, and the completion of individual learning plans to measure student engagement broadens the accountability system and will present a more holistic view of school success, although there’s some concern about the number and clarity around each of those indicators.

Nevada also has laid out a set of promising criteria to identify consistently underperforming subgroups, and its exit criteria for low-performing schools are clear, ambitious, and aligned to the state’s long-term vision for improvement.

Finally, the state’s plan for supporting low-performing schools leverages competitive grants to encourage districts toward more rigorous turnaround strategies, will utilize its achievement school district to serve those schools that fail to improve, and will prioritize the importance of additional staff members in the schools, such as social workers, who are critical to ensuring that struggling students are well-supported.

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

While Nevada is clearly attempting to broaden what it means to be a “good” school, there is a risk that Nevada’s list of 17 potential measures may be too cumbersome, and each individual indicator may lose relevance. Furthermore, this approach may create unnecessary confusion for school leaders about what to focus on.

Nevada does not include disaggregated subgroup performance in its five-star school-rating system. Instead, Nevada has created a back-end check to identify schools with consistently underperforming subgroups. As noted above, there are reasons to like the way Nevada is proposing to implement this check, but the state does not provide data on how many schools might be captured using its proposed definition. Going forward, Nevada should monitor its data to ensure this rule serves its purpose and does actually identify schools with low-performing subgroups.

With respect to school improvement, Nevada’s plan could be strengthened by providing additional details on how the list of evidence-based supports will be developed and clarifying the responsibilities of the state, districts, and charter schools.

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?



Nevada proposes six-year long-term goals, which expect faster progress for groups of students whose current performance is starting out lower. At the end of that term, Nevada plans to revisit the goals and establish new targets for all students to reach by 2030. The state has benchmarked its 2022 goal and interim targets on the fastest-improving states in the country, which is an ambitious and achievable target. Similarly, Nevada has seen strong graduation rate gains in recent years, and it aims to continue that progress by boosting its rates another 10 percentage points, on average, by 2022.

Nevada should be commended for its ambitious long-term goal of 90 percent for English-learner proficiency. The use of students’ initial English proficiency level and time in language instruction programs is consistent with research on language acquisition.

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?



Nevada has built its accountability system on high-quality standards and assessments that are aligned to college and careers. The state uses the Common Core State Standards and Smarter Balanced assessments in grades 3-8, and in high school it uses end-of-course exams, which help ensure that students are assessed on the full range of high school standards.

Given the state’s low performance and graduation rate for students with disabilities, Nevada recently passed legislation offering more robust post-secondary opportunities to students with disabilities and limiting the number of students assessed using the state’s alternate assessment.

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?

- 1
- 2
- ✓ 3
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Nevada’s plan includes a variety of indicators that represent a holistic view of school success. The state’s use of its long-term goals and interim targets within the achievement and graduation rate indicators clearly links the targets to a school’s overall rating. Nevada’s use of chronic absenteeism, school climate, and the completion of individual learning plans to measure student engagement broadens the accountability system while still employing rigorous, student-focused measures.

Nevada’s plan also does not always provide detailed information on the definition of each indicator and how each indicator is calculated. Several of the indicators include subcomponents with no guidance on the way they will be combined into one larger indicator. For example, a student engagement measure includes both chronic absenteeism and a school climate survey, but the plan does not specify how they would be combined. The state could also strengthen its plan by assigning greater weight to the four-year graduation rate, while still recognizing the value of an extended-year graduation rate.

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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Nevada is proposing to weight proficiency and growth, combined, at 60 percent of a school’s overall grade. Nevada has placed a significant emphasis on growth, giving it a weight of 35 percent, compared with 25 percent for proficiency. This balance will drive attention to both, with a greater emphasis on growth than static proficiency. Nevada’s achievement measure is a pure measure of student proficiency, which is easy to understand and will focus schools on helping students reach grade-level standards.

Nevada is planning to incorporate two complementary growth measures, one of which tracks student progress toward state standards, and another one that compares students with their similarly performing peers. However, the state does not say how it will combine these two growth measures into one larger “Academic Progress” indicator. The state could also better clarify the differences and interaction between the two growth measures.

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?



Nevada does not include specific weights for student subgroups in the state’s five-star school-rating system. However, Nevada has created a back-end check to identify schools with consistently underperforming subgroups. Any school that failed to reduce the number of nonproficient students by at least 10 percent over the previous year will be identified for targeted support and improvement. This could be a promising approach, especially because it is focused on proficiency rates for low-performing subgroups, but Nevada does not provide data on how many schools might be captured using this definition.

Nevada deserves credit for keeping its minimum threshold for including subgroups in its star rating system at 10 students. However, when the state will identify targeted support schools based on subgroup performance, it plans to instead use an n-size of 25. This inconsistency is problematic and could lead to fewer schools being identified due to the underperformance of student subgroups. While the rationale for changing the n-size is because of the nature of the “high stakes” decision, it is likely that the decision could result in students in smaller schools not receiving the resources and support they need. Again, more data would be helpful to understand the implications of Nevada’s proposals.

The state will be weighting English-language proficiency at 10 percent, which will help shine a light on schools that are not serving English learners well and will lead to greater supports for English-language acquisition. The inclusion of English-learner students for up to four years after they cease to receive English-learner services could mask the performance of those still receiving services. Since exiting students tend to have higher performance, the state should monitor its data to ensure it is not masking the performance of students who are still receiving services.

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?



Nevada plans to identify all of its one-star schools and all downward-trending two-star schools, as well as the bottom 5 percent of schools, as schools in need of comprehensive support. This makes a clear link between the state’s star rating system and its school-identification system, and helps align the two systems. However, the plan does not have similar alignment for schools with low-performing subgroups, and there’s uncertainty about the state’s proposed rules to identify schools in need of targeted support (see above). Similarly, the state could provide greater clarity around its definition for schools identified for “additional targeted support.”

Nevada includes a statement that it will give a label of “not rated” to any school that exclusively serves students with disabilities. The state indicates it has an alternative performance framework that applies to these schools, but it’s potentially problematic if the systems are not well aligned, especially if it creates incentives for students with disabilities to be sent out of traditional schools.

Nevada should be praised for emphasizing the importance of participating in state assessments by including a school’s participation rate in its accountability system. However, the state could strengthen its plan by imposing consequences for missing this target sooner than in the proposed timeline (three consecutive years). In addition, Nevada should consider monitoring participation rates going forward to ensure low-performing students are not inappropriately excluded from the assessment system.

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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Nevada should be applauded for its plan to create a competitive grant for its school-improvement fund, and its plan to differentiate tiers of improvement provides a solid foundation. In addition, Nevada’s ultimate consequence for continually failing schools is to place them into the Nevada Achievement School District. This is appropriately aggressive and provides a strong backstop against continued low performance. Nevada also deserves credit for maximizing its 7 percent set-aside for school improvement efforts through a competitive process that will prioritize strong evidence-based strategies, particularly in the state’s priority areas of turning around the lowest-performing schools, developing strong leadership teams, and analyzing data for decision-making.

However, Nevada could do more to align its support and improvement strategies in schools identified for targeted support and improvement to raise the achievement of the particular low-performing subgroup of students that led to the school’s identification. Moreover, Nevada could strengthen its plan by further aligning its periodic resource reviews for districts serving a significant number or percentage of identified schools with schools’ needs analyses and improvement plans. It would also be helpful for the state to clarify the responsibilities at various levels—state, district, school, charter authorizer.

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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Nevada’s exit criteria are, for the most part, strong and clear. Reaching a three-star rating to exit comprehensive support status is rigorous. However, the state may want to consider ongoing monitoring of these schools to ensure that they do not immediately fall back into one- or two-star status.

Similarly, the exit criteria for targeted support and improvement schools is clear and strong. It requires schools to meet their interim targets or reduce nonproficiency rates of the specific low-performing subgroup by 10 percent for two consecutive years. These targets are specific, tailored to individual schools, and linked directly to the reason the school was identified for improvement in the first place. Again, Nevada may want to monitor exited schools to make sure that they sustain this improvement, but these exit criteria present a potential model for other states.

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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Nevada should be applauded for its approach of setting goals for 2022 with the explicit intention to revisit these goals and set new goals for 2030. In addition, Nevada plans support a “Ready Network” to help share best practices and a data literacy campaign to help its educators read and interpret the state’s school rating system, provide parents with more transparent information, and engage periodically with the state’s Special Education Advisory Council.

However, Nevada could strengthen its plan by articulating how it intends to continuously evaluate and update its plan and modify its improvement strategies over time. Nevada could also explain how it will evaluate ongoing implementation efforts of its plan, as well as how it will consult with key stakeholders as the state revises its improvement strategies.