

ESSA Main Changes and Impacts

Accountability shift: Much of the control in defining what accountability will look like devolves back to states and local schools.

Title reorganization: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act revision puts ELL accountability in Title I, not Title III, where it always has been. This could be a good change for ELLs since Title I is where the education funding and influence have always resided. On the flip side, ELL needs could become overshadowed by other priorities. It's a big fish in a little sea versus a little fish in a big sea scenario.

State and local discretion: Under ESSA, states have more discretion in how to define growth targets and trajectories than before, and this is good since we have known from research that ELL growth is nonlinear and subject to multiple, complex factors. It may be bad in that states could set targets that are less ambitious (or *too* formulaic), and it is unclear what penalties, if any, would be set for not meeting targets.

More testing options: Schools can continue to choose to not require ELLs to take reading and language arts tests (nor report scores) until year two. Or, schools can test ELLs in year one but omit the scores for accountability purposes, using the year one score only as a baseline for future growth.

Keeping the ELL designation longer: States and schools can now keep ELLs in that subgroup for four years—double the time allowed under No Child Left Behind. Doing so allows schools to get credit for students' growth and success longer.

Distinguishing between all ELL students and ELL students with disabilities: ESSA outlines the differences between these two groups and recognizes points of intersection. This change should lead to fewer unnecessary special education referrals and a better understanding of how language development and the role of culture impact students as they learn English.

Using an asset-based label ESSA eliminates the use of the term “limited-English proficient,” which is outdated and can be demoralizing. These students are now referred to more accurately and respectfully as “English learners.”