

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The Washington School Improvement Framework (WSIF) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Background

- What is the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)? Why do I need to know about this?

ESSA is the major federal law that governs public education in the United States. Specifically, ESSA is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that was signed into law by President Obama on December 10, 2015. The previous 2002 reauthorization of ESEA was commonly referred to as No Child Left Behind and put in place measures that exposed achievement gaps among traditionally underserved student populations. ESSA continues to advance equity and requires that all students be taught to high academic standards that will prepare them for college and career.

For more information on ESSA, please see [Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction \(OSPI\)](#) or [the US Department of Education](#).

- Why should I be interested in learning about ESSA?

The reauthorization of federal education law happens infrequently and offers Washington a unique opportunity to innovate the way we approach education to improve outcomes for students. However, the task of preparing students for success after graduation is one the OSPI shares with students, families, and community members. To understand and partner in the work OSPI plans to do to support districts and schools, you can review our [ESSA Consolidated Plan](#).

Identification

- What is the Washington School Improvement Framework (WSIF)? How are schools identified? What is the “cut score?”

Washington has developed the WSIF, which uses a combination of academic indicators (i.e. English Language Arts and Math proficiency and growth, graduation, and English learner progress) with school quality and student success indicators (i.e. regular attendance, 9th graders on track to graduation and advanced course taking/dual credit). These indicators are combined into a weighted score which was used to identify schools for Comprehensive or Targeted supports.

- Schools identified for Comprehensive supports are schools whose overall performance for all of their students fell in the lowest 5% of Washington’s schools
- Schools identified for Comprehensive-Graduation Rate supports are schools with a four year graduation rate of less than 67%
- Schools identified for Targeted supports are schools whose overall performance is above the 5% threshold, but have specific student groups that are underperforming.

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For identification in 2018, the 5% threshold is a score that is equal to or below 2.3. That means that schools identified for Comprehensive supports have scores equal to or below 2.3, while schools identified for Targeted support have individual student group(s) scoring at or below a 2.3.

More detailed information on the methodology can be found in the [Washington ESSA Consolidated Plan](#).

- What does it mean that my school is identified (Comprehensive, Comprehensive-Graduation Rate, Targeted)?

If a school is identified for either Comprehensive or Targeted support, it means that they have specific performance areas to improve. This work is known as school improvement. Areas that a school might need to improve could be on a specific measurement, such as graduation or for overall performance for a certain student group, like students with disabilities. In the past, being identified for school improvement was often viewed negatively, but OSPI would like to change this perception. Public schools provide education for all children that walk through their door, but some students come to school with more needs than others. We believe the focus should be on making sure we can meet the needs of all students and that means identifying which schools need more support to do that.

- Is my school not doing well because they are identified?

OSPI believes that there is always room for improvement. Some schools are viewed as successful by many measures, but are still working hard to get better at what they excel at. Other schools have more work that they may have to do, but are also working hard to excel. While the WSIF examines school's performance on very important measures, it's important to remember there are many characteristics that can help us determine whether a school is "doing well."

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- I've heard more schools have been identified – is the new accountability metric harder?

The WSIF is not harder, but different. Because of Washington's commitment to educational equity, the methodology for the framework under ESSA changed to better identify areas where we must improve to achieve our vision that every child in Washington is prepared to be successful in career, college, and life.

While it is true that more schools have been identified for supports than in the past, OSPI views this positively because it highlights the breadth of work that must be undertaken to ensure that every student receives the educational experiences they need to be successful after they leave school.

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- Why are so many schools identified for Comprehensive-Grad Rate in alternative learning settings?

One improvement OSPI is implementing is differentiated support for districts and schools based on their needs. Since we are identifying schools that require additional support, we believe that the identification of alternative schools is helpful because these settings serve students that require differentiated supports themselves.

Second, we are looking at other meaningful metrics that can help us (i.e. OSPI, the district, and the school) with program evaluation and improvement planning. For example, graduation rate is calculated using a four year graduation rate and many students successfully graduate from alternative schools but at an extended graduation timeline.

- How is this different/similar to Priority or Focus? Do schools need to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)?

Under No Child Left Behind, schools were identified for improvement as either Priority or Focus schools and in order to be identified as improving they had to make Adequate Yearly Progress. Because we've completely redesigned our approach, there are few similarities. Comprehensive and Targeted are similar to Priority and Focus in that they're both category labels outlined in state and federal statute. Beyond this, implementation of ESSA and the new administration under Superintendent Reykdal mark a new approach to identification. We're moving away from punishment of "failing" schools, instead looking to provide redesigned supports for the schools with the greatest needs.

The accountability metrics have changed as well, looking at more than just graduation rate and student achievement scores to determine if a school has areas to improve. The new WSIF expands the measures to include growth, English learner progress, regular attendance, and, if applicable, measures of college and career readiness, like advanced course (dual credit) offerings and 9th graders on track to graduation. Schools will not be required to make Adequate Yearly Progress as defined under No Child Left Behind but will have to make progress as determined in their improvement plans.

- As a community member/parent where can I find out more information about my district and school?

There are a few places for community members and families to find information about their district and school. The first avenue is to reach out to your district and school directly! Another avenue of information can also be your local school boards.

To find out more about the performance of your school, visit the [Report Card](#) site, maintained by the state education agency, [OSPI](#).

Supports

- As a community member/parent/family member what can I do to support my school?

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Your local school is best positioned to let you know how you can support your school. Please check your school's website, social media site(s), or call your local school to find out when the next parent/family engagement event will be held. You may also want to inquire about volunteering at your school or donating supplies.

Perhaps the most important role is supporting the children in your lives. Practice learning together for both academics (for example, reading together) or fun (like learning to cook a new recipe). Try to make sure they arrive at school ready to learn (for example, make sure they get enough rest, support regular attendance including on-time arrival). Ask them about school using open-ended questions to encourage them to talk (for example, "What was something new that you learned today?" and not yes/no questions like, "Did you have a good day at school?"). Talk to them about their hopes and dreams for their future and share your hopes and dreams for them.

- What other kinds of information or communication should I expect from my district or school?

Information and communications from local school and districts will vary by location. However, schools should communicate some key information such as your student's performance on statewide assessments, information about the school's report card, and the school's improvement status. Parents and families members are also invited to work with school staff to design the school improvement plan. Some schools have additional specific information they are required to communicate to parents and families if they meet certain federal requirements.