

Module 7: How School Performance Is Determined

Lesson One: About the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Lesson Two: State and Local Reporting Requirements

Lesson Three: Families as Advocates for Their Children's Education

Module Overview: Welcome to Module 7: How School Performance Is Determined. This module will provide information on the laws, formulas, and structures that control how school performance is assessed in the U.S. education system. It will also explain the importance of parental advocacy for their child's education and advise on how School Liaisons and parents can use information on school performance to promote parental engagement in their community.

Learning Objectives: Through this module, School Liaisons will be able to:

- Describe the major components of the Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), including the assessment and accountability measures.
- Explain how to share the major components of the public reporting requirements with families and help them use the data to support their child's education.
- Describe the benefits of parental engagement and strategies for assisting families.

Lesson One: About the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Lesson Overview: One of the core laws influencing school performance measures is the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or ESEA. ESEA was first enacted in 1965 to provide compensatory funds to elementary and secondary schools with high percentages of low-income students. ESEA is periodically reauthorized, with the most recent reauthorization passed by Congress in 2001 and is better known as the No Child Left Behind Act.

Learning Objectives:

Upon the completion of this lesson the learner will be able to:

- Describe the major components of ESEA, particularly the assessment and accountability requirements.

The Ultimate Goal of ESEA

The primary goal of the current ESEA is to close achievement gaps between disadvantaged groups of students and their peers and to ensure that 100 percent of students are proficient on state assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics by 2013–14.

To assess progress towards this goal, states are required to test all students annually in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school in reading/language arts and mathematics and to set annual targets toward the 100 percent proficiency goal. Schools that attain the targets are said to have made “adequate yearly progress” (AYP).

ESEA requires each state to develop standards and assessments in math and English/language arts and to define what “proficiency” means according to the assessments. However, the school improvement provisions that are tied to school performance apply only to schools that receive funds under the Federal Title I program, which is provided to schools with high concentrations of students from low-income families.

Title I schools that fail to meet AYP are subject to sanctions and interventions, which increase in severity the longer a school does not meet AYP.

ESEA Requirements and State Flexibility

ESEA sets requirements that all states are required to follow in determining whether schools make AYP. They include annual assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics; annual targets toward the goal of 100 percent proficiency by 2013–14; accountability for raising performance in both subject areas by the school overall and by four subgroups (economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency); improved performance on an additional academic indicator chosen by the state to rate schools at the elementary and middle school level; improvement on graduation rates for high schools; and a 95 percent participation rate on the state tests.

States are provided flexibility to, among other things, develop content standards and each assessment; choose the additional academic performance indicator for the elementary and middle grades, such as the school attendance rate, and determine the amount of progress required on this indicator each year; determine the level of performance on state tests by a student to be considered “proficient”; and set annual proficiency targets consistent with the goal of reaching 100 percent proficiency by 2013–2014.

States also are required to test students in science at least once in grades 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12, but schools are not held accountable in AYP for these results. State content standards and assessments are reviewed by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to ensure they are aligned and that they produce valid and reliable results.

Meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

For a school to make AYP, all four student subgroups and the school overall must meet the annual state target on the reading/language arts and mathematics tests, 95 percent of students must participate in each test, and the school must meet the other academic indicator (state's choice at the elementary and middle grades and graduation rate for high schools). If the school overall or if a single subgroup misses its target in mathematics or reading/language arts, if less than 95 percent of all students take the tests, or if the other indicator goal is missed, the school does not make AYP.

Title I schools that miss AYP 2 years in a row are identified as "in need of improvement" and must provide higher-performing school choice options to students. Schools that miss AYP 3 years in a row must offer low-income students supplementary education services (such as tutoring). Title I schools that fail to meet AYP for 4 consecutive years are subject to corrective action and must develop a plan to address their deficiencies, and Title I schools that miss AYP for 5 years must plan for restructuring. Another year of failure results in the school being required to implement the restructuring plan, which can include replacing the school staff, converting the school to a charter school, or a state takeover of the school. To exit "in need of improvement" status, a school must make AYP for 2 consecutive years. States are required to measure AYP for all schools, but only Title I schools are required to implement improvements or corrective actions.

Additional Measures of School Performance

Many states have their own school accountability system, which may differ in key ways from what ESEA requires. For example, some states, such as Florida, grade schools from A through F based on academic performance. Other states, such as California, have developed indexes for schools based on test performance and compare schools' performance with that of other schools. But these measures often use different criteria than the Federal determinations; for example, they might not consider the performance of subgroups. Thus the ratings for schools on the state and Federal measures might differ.

Some states and school districts require norm-referenced tests (NRTs), which compare a student's performance to the other students who took the assessment, rather than whether or not a student knows a sufficient amount of material to be considered passing.

The U.S. Department of Education has authorized the use of "growth models" in 15 states for use in Title I accountability determinations. These models indicate whether student performance has improved over the course of a year, not just whether students have reached the proficiency bar.

Trends in Measuring School Performance

Forty-four states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core State Standards in reading/language arts and mathematics, which were developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association. These standards are intended to set expectations for students in each grade level that would lead to college and career readiness by the end of high school.

The Obama administration has provided \$330 million to two consortia of states to develop new assessments to measure the Common Core State Standards. States were permitted to join more than one consortium, and 45 states and the District of Columbia are currently part of one or both. The new assessments, which are expected to measure students' progress toward college and career readiness, are expected to be implemented in 2014–15.

The current iteration of ESEA is slated to be revised. While the exact timing of the reauthorization is unknown, the Obama administration has released its “blueprint” for reform, which would, among other changes, require states to base academic standards on college and career readiness, encourage states to include performance on other subjects in accountability ratings, measure school performance on growth as well as proficiency status, provide rewards to high-performing schools, and focus interventions on the lowest-performing schools.

Lesson One Summary

Key Points:

- ESEA is one of the core laws influencing school performance measures.
- The primary goal of the current ESEA is to close achievement gaps between disadvantaged groups of students and their peers and to ensure that 100 percent of students are proficient on state assessments in reading/language arts and math by 2013–14.
- State progress toward meeting the primary goal of ESEA is assessed by state testing of students in grades 3–8 and once in high school in reading/language arts and math and by the setting of annual targets that progress to 100 percent proficiency. Schools that attain the targets meet “adequate yearly progress” (AYP).
- Schools that receive Title I funding for having a high number of low-income students are subject to sanctions and interventions if they do not meet AYP. States are required to measure AYP for all schools, but only Title I schools are subject to sanctions and corrective actions.
- ESEA set requirements that all states must follow in determining whether schools meet AYP; however, states are provided flexibility to, among other things, develop content standards and assessments that are then reviewed by the ED for alignment and to ensure that they produce valid and reliable results.
- A school meets AYP when all student subgroups and the school overall meet the annual state target on the reading/language arts and math tests, at least 95 percent of students participate in each test, and the school has met other academic indicators.
- Additional measures of student performance have been developed by many states including individual state accountability systems, norm-referenced tests, and “growth models” for Title I accountability determinations.
- The Common Core State Standards are intended to set expectations for students in each grade level that would lead to college and career readiness by the end of high school.

Looking Forward: Next, learn how state and local reporting requirements mandate the provision of useful data that can help military families support their child’s education.

Lesson Two: State and Local Reporting Requirements

Lesson Overview: To provide families with information about how schools are performing and to close achievement gaps between groups of students, Federal law mandates that public schools publicize information about student achievement and standards. Families can be overwhelmed and confused by the amount of information that is available about school performance. School Liaisons need to know about state and local school reporting requirements in order to help families make informed choices about their child's education.

Learning Objectives:

Upon completing this lesson, School Liaisons will be able to:

- Explain how to share the major components of the public reporting requirements with families and help them use the data to support their child's education.

Reporting Requirements and Family Involvement

The primary goal of the current ESEA is to close achievement gaps between disadvantaged groups of students and their peers and to ensure that 100 percent of students are proficient on state assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics by 2013–14.

As mandated by ESEA, school districts are required to provide disaggregated information on student performance at the district and school level.

Under ESEA, publicly available report cards are required to include the following information:

- Assessment results for all students in reading/language arts, mathematics and science. Results must be disaggregated by:
 - All students
 - Major racial and ethnic groups
 - Students with disabilities
 - Limited English proficient status
 - Economic status (i.e., economically disadvantaged)
 - Migrant status
 - Gender¹
- Information on student achievement at each proficiency level (advanced, proficient, basic, below basic), disaggregated by subgroups
- Information on the other academic indicators used for AYP determinations, including the graduation rate for high schools and the state’s “additional academic indicator(s)” for elementary and middle schools, disaggregated by subgroups
- Whether the school has been identified as in need of improvement
- The school’s performance on state tests compared with the district and the state
- The total number of schools in the district identified for school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring and the percentage of the schools in the district they represent
- The name of each school identified for improvement, corrective action or restructuring and how long each school has been identified. Information on schools identified as being in need of improvement; corrective action or restructuring must be provided for Title I schools.
- Schools are also required to notify parents that they may request information about whether their child’s teacher is “highly qualified” under NCLB and must notify parents when their child is taught by a teacher who is teaching out-of-field or under emergency credentials.

¹ Subgroups of migrant status and gender are for reporting purposes only and are not among the required subgroups for adequate yearly progress (AYP) determinations.

Lesson Two Summary

Key Points:

- In support of one of its main goals to give families information about their child's education, ESEA requires that public schools publicize data about student achievement and standards.
- Families can be overwhelmed and confused by the amount of information that is available about school performance.
- School districts are required to provide information on student performance at the district and school level in the form of publically available report cards that include assessment results for all students in core subjects and other key demographics.

Looking Forward: Next, learn how parents can be effective advocates for their children's education.

Lesson Three: Families as Advocates for Their Children's Education

Lesson Overview: There are clear benefits to parental involvement in advocating for their child's education. School Liaisons should empower families to be effective advocates for the education of their children as well as share ways that schools are held accountable to ensuring the educational success of students.

Objectives:

Upon completing this lesson, School Liaisons will be able to:

- Describe the benefits of parent engagement and strategies for assisting families.

Parental Involvement & Engagement Strategies

An understanding of the benefits of parental involvement and an explanation of key strategies provides School Liaisons the information needed to empower military parents as advocates for their children's education.

Information and Parental Involvement

Armed with information on school performance, parents can serve as effective advocates for their children's education by

- choosing a school that is appropriate for their children;
- advocating on behalf of their children for improved performance by the school; and
- providing their children with resources and support to improve academic performance.

Benefits of Parental Involvement

The U.S. Department of Education notes that, "A synthesis of the research concluded that

- families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life, and
- when schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more."²

Studies have found that students with involved families, no matter what their income or background, are more likely to:

- Earn high grades and test scores and enroll in higher-level programs;
- Pass their classes, earn credits and be promoted;
- Attend school regularly; and
- Graduate and go on to postsecondary education.³

Key Family Engagement Strategies

- volunteering in their child's school or early learning program;
- maintaining lines of communication with teachers about their child's learning experience through face-to-face interactions, phone conversations, and online communication;
- participation in parent-teacher conferences; and
- understanding educational standards and what they can do to help their children stay on track toward meeting them.

²Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement* (p. 13). Retrieved from <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>.

³Ibid. (p. 7).

Ways School Liaisons Can Help Families Advocate

School Liaisons can play a critical role in empowering parents to advocate for their children's education. Here are some ways that School Liaisons can help families do this successfully.

Help Families Digest Information

The amount of information about and from schools can be overwhelming and confusing for families. School Liaisons can play a key role in helping families digest this information, understand the ways that schools are held accountable for ensuring that all students are being provided with a quality education, and understand the various ways they can get involved in their student's education.

Direct Families to Local Parent Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs)

School Liaisons can direct families to local Parent Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs). PIRC's were established by ESEA and are funded to assist families in understanding accountability data and the availability of school choice and supplemental services options. The centers also provide resources for parental involvement in schools and strengthen partnerships among parents, teachers, principals, and other school personnel to meet the needs of children. Under the law, PIRC's must use at least 50 percent of their funds to serve areas with high concentrations of children from low-income families and 30 percent of their funds for early childhood programs.

Provide Information to Parents and Commanding Officers on the Performance of School Districts and Schools

School Liaisons can play a critical role in providing information to parents and commanding officers on the performance of school districts and schools. Understanding how schools are rated by ESEA and the state accountability system (if one exists) is important information to provide to individuals inquiring about the quality of schools in the area. It is very important for School Liaisons to provide data on schools and help families understand how schools are performing, but they should not advise families on where they should enroll their children. The role of a School Liaison is to provide unbiased information on schools and allow families to interpret and make schooling decisions that will best meet their needs.

Other Ways School Liaisons Can Help

- Inform families in the beginning of the school year, or when they enter the installation, about the key contacts in the local schools and staff structure.
- Inform families about local PTA and parent groups.
- Help families understand performance data on schools.
- Help families choose appropriate schools based on their child's needs.
- Provide dates for upcoming events and functions.
- Provide a list of tips on ways families can become advocates.
- Share the list of tips with your school officials.

Lesson Three Summary

Key Points:

- Parents can serve as effective advocates for their children by choosing a school that is appropriate, advocating on behalf of their children for improved performance by a school, and providing their children with resources and support to improve academic performance.
- Research has shown that families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and that students with involved families are more successful at school.
- School Liaisons play a key role in helping families be knowledgeable about how to advocate for their children's education and should direct families to local Parent Information and Resource Centers (PIRC) to obtain additional support and information about school performance and accountability.
- While School Liaisons must provide families and installation commanders with important information about school performance, they are not to advise families where to enroll their children in school.

Looking Forward: Next, assess your understanding of this lesson.

Module Summary

Module Overview: This module provides information on the laws, formulas, and structures that control how school performance is assessed in the U.S. education system. It also explains the importance of parental advocacy for their child’s education and advises how School Liaisons and parents can use information on school performance to promote parental engagement in their community.

Key Points:

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- ESEA set requirements that all states must follow in determining whether schools meet AYP; however, states are provided flexibility to, among other things, develop content standards and assessments that are then reviewed by the U.S. Department of Education for alignment and to ensure that they produce valid and reliable results.
- A school meets AYP when all four student subgroups and the school overall meet the annual state target on the reading/language arts and math tests, at least 95 percent of students participate in each test and the school has met other academic indicators.
- Additional measures of student performance have been developed by many states including individual state accountability systems, norm-referenced tests, and “growth models” for Title I accountability determinations.
- The Common Core State Standards are intended to set expectations for students in each grade level that would lead to college and career readiness by the end of high school.
- In support of one of its main goals to give families information about their child’s education, ESEA requires that public schools publicize data about student achievement and standards.
- Families can be overwhelmed and confused by the amount of information that is available about school performance.
- School districts are required to provide information on student performance at the district and school level in the form of publically available report cards that include assessment results for all students in core subjects and key demographics.
- Parents can serve as effective advocates for their children by choosing a school that is appropriate, advocating on behalf of their children for improved performance by a school, and providing their children with resources and support to improve academic performance.
- Research has shown that families have a major influence on their children’s achievement in school and that students with involved families are more successful at school.
- School Liaisons play a key role in helping families be knowledgeable about how to advocate for their children’s education and should direct families to local Parent Information and Resource

Centers (PIRC) to obtain additional support and information about school performance and accountability.

- While School Liaisons must provide families and installation commanders with important information about school performance, they are not to advise families where to enroll their children in school.

Looking Forward: Next, learn about ways that School Liaisons can support the success of military-connected students.