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Holistic Approaches to State School Grading Systems

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ABSTRACT

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The United States education system has experienced an evolution of school accountability systems that has led to changes and variation in state school grading systems. This study shows that the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, a recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, provides greater autonomy to individual states in evaluating and reporting school accountability than in preceding years and provides opportunities for states to implement a more holistic or well-rounded approach to school grading. ESSA policy and this study encourages states to choose to evaluate schools more holistically by implementing a wider and more balanced range of indicators that are used to formulate publicly reported school grades.

Many issues and historical events, both in the nation and in Utah, are shared to show their influence on the evolution of school accountability. The relevant components of ESSA are explored. An historical overview of school accountability, standardized testing, school grading, and public educational reporting in the state of Utah is included. Scholarly perspectives about school accountability and reporting systems are also presented.

This descriptive study incorporates archival research through a review of grades K-8 school grading systems. The school report card systems and indicators are collected and compared from two sequential time periods: first, the time period after NCLB and before ESSA plans were approved is referred, and second, the current time period, based off of data from currently implemented state ESSA plans. Data from all 50 states and Washington D.C. are analyzed and contrasted with Utah's data. Special focus is placed on the indicators that are not dictated by the federal government but those which are chosen by the state that promote a more holistic measure of accountability.

The results from this study show that while a more holistic approach to school grading across the states has resulted from ESSA implementation, Utah's ESSA plan and school grading system, along with the other 49 states and Washington D.C., do not currently reflect an adequate holistic measure of school accountability. State Legislators and State School Board Members will find this study to be enlightening as they create more holistic school grading systems.

Keywords: education, school accountability, Every Student Succeeds Act, differentiation, school report card, holistic

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Educators have experienced a dramatic evolution over the years with state school accountability systems, one component of which is state school grading systems. Not only are students assessed and graded on their academic proficiency, but schools are graded on their performance as well. Evolution has occurred in federal school accountability systems that has led to changes and variation in state school grading systems. This variation resulted in a continual change in focus for both academic and non-academic indicators used to give school grades as a measure of demonstrating school accountability. School grading systems among the states ranges from narrower evaluation of a few indicators to a more holistic measure that implements several indicators. Holistic approaches to state school grading systems are those that provide a balanced, well-rounded, and more complete approach for teaching and learning.

Amendments X and XIV of the United States Constitution set the premise for this study (U.S. Const. amend X, XIV). These Amendments have considerable significance in establishing both the authority and focus of our educational system. Amendment X was ratified in 1791 and states, "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people" (U.S. Const. amend. X, p. 1). The Amendment X establishes that educational authority belongs to the states and not to the federal government. The Amendment XIV was ratified in 1868 and although it does not specifically address education, it had tremendous impact in shaping school accountability measures by ensuring "that states must apply the law equally to all people and cannot discriminate against groups of people" (Boyd, 2014, p. 1).

Perhaps due to the educational disparity and inequality in applying the law among the states, the federal government became increasingly involved in education. Since the beginning of the 20th century, public schools have experienced unprecedented federal legislation with mandated state testing, incentives, and consequences (U.S. National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). With the influence of Amendment XIV becoming more defined through the national legal system, in 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson made a huge impact on educational equality through his "War on Poverty." A monumental action that proved to have enduring influence on public education was the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Education and Labor, General Subcommittee on Education, 1965).

Reauthorization of the 1965 ESEA Act occurred periodically and the rights guaranteed from the Amendment XIV are intertwined in them. The 2001 reauthorization of ESSA, known as The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), expanded the role of the federal government more than any other reauthorization or educational act since ESEA in 1965. The premise of NCLB was to boost student achievement, especially for poor and minority groups. Dissatisfaction increased with NCLB, partly because of the perception that the increased federalization of education was not in harmony with the precepts of Amendment X (Bloomfield, 2003).

Most recently, another reauthorization of President Johnson's 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was initiated by President Barack Obama in 2015, called the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; 2015). This bill was the first to lessen the federal government's role in education since the 1980s. Over the years, a myriad of prescriptive and explicit indicators evolved from federal mandates to states and schools. This accountability

evolution required annual testing and evaluation of indicators that promoted advances in the performance of various groups of students considered to be the most vulnerable.

The evolution of these increasingly rigid initiatives stand in contrast to the flexibility currently granted to states through the ESSA to determine many of their own indicators and measures of school success (Kemp, 2020). Considering this increased flexibility, states were still required to submit their ESSA plans for approval to the US Department of Education and to conform to guidelines that revolves the common indicators of proficiency measurements in English Language Arts, Math, and growth measurements of the lowest performing students. Each state implemented its plan beginning in the 2018-2019 school year (U.S. Congress, 2015).

ESSA allows states to broaden their vision of school accountability by providing a balanced, well-rounded, and more complete approach for teaching and learning. This holistic approach for school accountability may measure a variety of indicators, such as early childhood learning, social and emotional learning, school professional capacity building, arts integration, STEM, and other various indicators (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2017). States are required to choose at least one additional indicator, such as science, attendance, or social studies. Many states only include the minimum or nearly the minimum that ESSA requires. Utah, for instance, requires indicators for science and lower achieving students. These states and Utah are not complying with the law's allowance to include a much broader selection of school accountability indicators (Phenicie, 2018).

Another required component of ESSA is that each state determines a "system of meaningful differentiation," or comparison, between schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2017, p. 11). Utah has implemented A-F school letter grades since 2011 (Utah State Board of Education, 2013, p. 1), and Utah has determined to continue issuing schools an A-F letter grade

to differentiate between schools (S.B. 271 School Grading Amendments, 2013, p. 6). Proficiency Indicators of English Language Arts, Math, Science, and growth of the lowest performing students are required as part of Utah's system of meaningful differentiation that are key to the determination of the letter grade schools receive on the state issued school report cards.

Holistic Education

A holistic approach to education may be synonymous with a well-rounded or complete approach to education. Ameritech College surmises, "A holistic approach means thinking about the big picture" (Jones, 2016, p. 1). All three terms, holistic, well-rounded, and complete, are used interchangeably in various official and unofficial documents describing recommended approaches for state ESSA plans.

The U.S. Department of Education released ESSA regulations to promote well-rounded education with the intent to support states in using allowable flexibility to provide a high-quality, well-rounded education. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) required standardized testing from the states and punitive measures for districts and schools that did not meet those standards. "Though frequently overlooked, NCLB allows states to include other criteria besides reading and math test scores into its AYP calculations. But because the law doesn't provide any bonus or reward for meeting or exceeding such additional goals—and these goals serve only as further opportunities for schools to miss AYP—no states incorporated them into their federally mandated accountability systems" (Griffith & Mellor, 2014, p. 1). The Department stated:

> The final regulations will replace the rigid and prescriptive systems that defined No Child Left Behind with new flexibility for state and districts; a more holistic approach to measuring a quality education… The final regulations give states the flexibility to think

> holistically about how to improve outcomes for all students while helping to ensure access to a well-rounded education. (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a, pp. 1-2)

A major ESSA provision states:

> The final regulations reinforce the statutory requirement that states have robust, multi-indicator statewide accountability systems for all public schools, including all public charter schools, underscoring the flexibility they have to choose new indicators that create a more holistic view of student success. (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b, p. 2)

Laura Jimenez, the director of standards and accountability at the Center for American Progress clarified this approach from ESSA policy when she shared, "Perhaps even more important than students' improved performance on tests, those who receive a well-rounded education are likely better-prepared for college and careers because they develop a wider range of knowledge and skills necessary to succeed" (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2018, p. 5). These statements support the stance that ESSA promotes a holistic approach from the states, whether the terminology used is "holistic," "well-rounded," or "complete."

The National Association of Elementary School Principals posted a publication to encourage and assist principals in their involvement with ESSA while at the same time contributed to the definition of a holistic approach to education. They stated:

> The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) broadly defines a well-rounded and complete education as one that provides students with access to positive, developmentally appropriate learning environments that meets students' learning and related needs, including through services, conditions, and teaching practices around content that is aligned across grade levels, particularly in the early years from

> prekindergarten to the third grade. (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2017)

Principals are encouraged to "use ESSA implementation to cultivate and support this balanced, holistic vision for teaching and learning" (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2017, p. 4).

During the official enactment of ESSA, the 114th Congress clearly defined well-rounded education:

> The term `well-rounded education' means courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, geography, computer science, music, career and technical education, health, physical education, and any other subject, as determined by the State or local educational agency, with the purpose of providing all students access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience. (U.S. Congress, 2015, p. 305)

As established, the term "holistic" may be considered synonymous with "well-rounded" or "complete," for the purpose of this study, "holistic" is the term most referred to and can be considered synonymous with "well-rounded."

A key consideration is that ESSA is different than its predecessor, NCLB. ESSA does not dictate policy as rigidly as was done through NCLB. States may choose to implement a more holistic approach to school accountability by implementing a well-rounded variety of indicators that contribute to the grade a school receives on annual state issued report cards. For holistic education to occur, states must decide to take advantage of these opportunities allowed by ESSA law.

The Problem and Its Significance

The components of Utah's ESSA plan which determine a school's letter grade do not reflect a holistic measure of school performance. This article addresses that problem. Utah's ESSA plan focuses only on a few indicators selected by state legislators and other policy makers who do not share a comparatively broader vision of holistic school accountability through the implementation of a strategic variety of indicators of school performance.

Prior to the issuance of the current ESSA plans, the U.S. Department of Education permitted states to expand on the requirements of NCLB by indicating that states may develop additional indicators if they choose" (Hickcock, 2002, p. 33). Some states (Alabama, Connecticut, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, and Nevada) were authorized by their individual state policy makers to implement locally determined indicators, or indicators that were decided in the trenches, at the individual school level. This allowed individual school leaders to select indicators they felt were most important for their school's individual success. These locally determined indicators were valued since they had weight on state-issued school grades. Currently, while permitted under ESSA policy, local school districts and schools are not authorized by any state's policy makers to independently decide locally determined indicators that could have weight towards the grade a school receives. The neglect of empowering local schools in this process may lead to a less accurate representation of school success since individual and unique school needs are not addressed.

If those who make policies for elementary and middle schools, such as state legislators and state school board members, persist in decisions that overlook a more holistic measure of school performance, the school grading system will continue to reflect a narrow and less accurate view of school accountability. Measured indicators, those that bear weight on the final grade a

school receives, receive primary priority and focus which result in less priority being given to many other important aspects of school performance (Hannaway & Hamilton, 2008). Policy requires all states to grade schools. This challenge of addressing a possible reductionistic view of accountability is one that should be considered by policy makers in every state.

Purpose of This Study

This study is a review and critique of the relevant components of Utah's ESSA plan (U.S. Department of Education, 2018) which outlines the formulation of a school's letter grade, and determines whether these components are sufficient and reflect a holistic measure of school performance. This study will address four primary research questions:

1. What are the state school grading systems and indicators that were in use just prior to ESSA), as well as those that are currently in place through ESSA, by all 50 states plus Washington, D.C.?
2. Does a comparison of the optional indicators found in each state's plan during these two time periods reflect a trend towards holistic approaches to school grading?
3. What state level school grading system and indicators were and are being implemented by the state of Utah?
4. Are Utah elementary and middle schools (K-8) being held accountable for indicators in Utah's state school grading system that represent a holistic approach?

Research Design and Methodology

This study included data from each individual state's elementary and middle school accountability plans. Those plans were found on each state's department of education website. Analysis included comparisons of indicators and school grading systems found in both current state ESSA plans as well as those used just prior to the implementation of the current plans.

Elementary and middle school accountability systems and indicators across the United States were compared with those in Utah's ESSA plan. This study especially focused on the indicators not dictated by the federal government but those which were chosen by the states that promote a more holistic measure of accountability. The indicators were charted to create a visual comparison to distinguish and quantify the variety of indicators implemented, or the lack thereof.

Value of the Study

Careful consideration of the findings of the four research questions will provide a sound perspective on matters pertaining to school grading. The results of this study will be of value to Utah school policy makers as well as policy makers in other states, and to those who implement and influence school policy because it portrays trend data about optional indicators that contribute to school grades. It will also be of value because it provides comparative data of each state in the nation which may contribute to forming perspectives when considering revising the components of the state grading plans, specifically, the decision to include a holistic representation of school quality indicators and measures. In addition, this study will provide policy makers with an enlightened perspective of school grading or reporting methods, such as A-F letter grades, data dashboards, numerical rating, etc.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Many issues and historical events, both in the nation and in Utah, influenced the evolution of school accountability which led in part to Utah's school grading system. A general overview of the relevant components of the ESSA is provided. An historical overview of school accountability, standardized testing, school grading, and public educational reporting in the state of Utah is included. Scholarly perspectives about school accountability and reporting systems are also presented.

The Rise of Federal Accountability in Education

As a senator, Robert F. Kennedy said during a 1965 Senate hearing:

> I think it is very difficult for a person who lives in a community to know whether, in fact, his educational system is what it should be, whether if you compare his community to a neighboring community they are doing everything they should be, whether the people that are operating the educational system in a state or local community are as good as they should be.… I wonder if we couldn't have some system of reporting…through some testing system that would be established (by) which the people at the local community would know periodically…what progress had been made. (McKenzie, 2015, p. 2)

What is the best way to teach the children of America? What should be taught to the children of America? How do we know how much a student has learned? The responses to these questions are varied, controversial, and continually developing. As a nation, we often experiment in an effort to answer these questions. The specific skills and measures of competency that are required of students to progress in the school system are called academic standards. Not only have the standards changed over time, but the way they are assessed has evolved as well. The

standards and assessments place responsibility, or accountability, for student learning and achievement on states, school districts, schools, principals, teachers, and students:

> Education reform in the United States since the 1980s has been largely driven by the setting of academic standards for what students should know and be able to do. These standards can then be used to guide all other system components. The SBE (standards-based education) reform movement calls for clear, measurable standards for all school students. Rather than norm-referenced rankings, a standards-based system measures each student against the concrete standard. Curriculum, assessments, and professional development are aligned to the standards. (Glavin, 2014, p. 1)

There has been a dramatic evolution in student assessment over the years in the United States which has contributed to the current state of federal educational accountability and state school accountability systems. Beginning in the 1800s, student assessments, based on quantifiable information, were the primary measures of student academic attainment. Student testing for various purposes, including "identifying students for either factory employment or university academic paths, to assist the United States Army in deciding the military career path of new recruits, or as a means to rank students according to various academic standards," was in use in the United States as early as 1845, and quite likely, much earlier than that (Schaeffer, 2016, pp. 2, 4). This section, however, is not intended to be an in-depth exploration of assessments given to students, but rather, a historical overview showing relevant factors that contributed to current school accountability measures, including the practice of grading schools. The two are correlated. As student assessment has evolved and become increasingly standardized, those measures, used in a cumulative fashion, have evolved to become the key factors in determining school grading.

Evidence of student assessment that led to current educational accountability requirements in the United States may be found prior to 1845, when, in the climate of increasing criticism, most school exams were completed orally and publicly:

> Public examinations were generally held once a year and were more in the nature of public displays or exhibitions to show off brilliant pupils or to glorify teachers. It was as a result of abuses to which such displays gave rise and of the criticisms which they prompted that written exams began to be introduced. (Kandel, 1936, p. 24)

It was in this climate in 1845, when Horace Mann challenged the common method of assessing students and created written exams; as the secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, his new exams received credibility and broad-scale acceptance and adoption (Garrison, 2009, pp. 95-97): "His (Mann's) model was so successful that competitive written exams were adopted by school systems in nearly all U.S. cities, and in 1865, the New York Regents Exams were developed on the basis of Mann's assessment concepts" (Gallagher, 2003, p. 85).

Even though society's understanding of equality has evolved, the fundamental truth that "all men are created equal," was laid down at the inception of our country (National Archives, 2019) and was further defined with Amendment XIV. These officially provided the foundational principles that guide and form educational accountability. Since the inception of the nation, the federal government has become increasingly involved in education. Almost a century after that declaration, the federal government established the Department of Education in 1867, with an overall purpose of reporting on educational progress of the states and territories. This department was soon demoted to an Office of Education in 1868 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The Office of Education continued to operate under different titles and was housed by various

governmental agencies over the years until a cabinet position of Secretary of Education was re-established in 1979, during President Carter's administration.

Also of monumental significance to the continual evolution of school accountability was the 1868 ratification of the Amendment XIV to the U.S. Constitution (U.S. Const. amend XIV). The equal protection clause of Amendment XIV has been interpreted by the Supreme Court to guarantee a wide range of fundamental rights to all citizens. As explained by U.S. Constitution experts, this equal protection clause emphasis that "No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the united states… nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws" was clearly intended to stop state governments from discriminating against black Americans, and over the years would play a key role in many landmark civil rights cases" (History.com Editors, 2020). The protections asserted in the Amendment XIV guided the formation of the school accountability measures in the United States.

An increased demand for educational accountability and the drive to provide an appropriate education led the government to address issues of educational inequity based on racial and economic factors, and to the Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). A revolutionary movement of educational accountability ensued: "This idea came to be known as 'school accountability,' and was built around three principles: Creating rigorous academic standards, measuring student progress against those standards, and attaching some consequence to the results" (McKenzie, 2015, p. 1). School districts and state education systems became increasingly accountable to policymakers and taxpayers to provide an appropriate education, based on the three principles of school accountability, for every student. This demand for accountability led to the monumental and unprecedented educational reforms of the 1960s.

President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This law required the commissioner of education to conduct and report on a survey concerning the lack of availability of equal educational opportunities for individuals by reason of race, color, religion, or national origin in public educational institutions (The Civil Rights Act, 1964). A sociologist from Johns Hopkins University, James Coleman, was commissioned with the task to gather a team and survey the entire United States and offer conclusions about the equity, or fairness, of public education. This was a difficult and unprecedented task, partly because it was in Coleman's nature to be very thorough, to consider various angles, and to try to put aside any personal biases. In addition, prior to this study, funding and resource distribution were not carefully collaborated or reported on a large national scale. Another factor that added to the complexity of this study was that nationwide standardized tests did not yet exist. Coleman analyzed his findings from a sampling of 600,000 students and 60,000 teachers from 4,000 schools throughout the nation (The Civil Rights Act, 1964).

It is interesting to note that Coleman recognized holistic education as part of the responsibilities of schools, which in addition to academic subjects, included measuring intelligence, attitudes, and qualities of character. What Coleman ultimately determined to measure and what he considered to be most important was "intellectual skills, such as reading, writing, calculating, and problem solving" (Coleman, 1966, p. 20) It can also be implied that Coleman believed the purpose of education was to help society and individuals acquire gainful future employment when he stated, "What they [these tests or intellectual skills] measure are the skills which are among the most important in our society for getting a good job and moving up to a better one, and for full participation in an increasingly technical world" (Coleman, 1966, p. 20).

The Coleman Report, more formally known as The Equality of Educational Opportunity Report, resulted in lengthy and involved findings. As was expected, the report confirmed that segregation indeed existed and that there were academic disparities between African American and Caucasian students. However, what was surprising was the conclusion that the biggest determinant of how well a child would learn was a student's family background (including value placed on education and the family's financial security), coupled with a diverse socioeconomic mix in the classroom (Dickinson, 2016, pp. 1, 3-4).

Karl Alexander, one of Coleman's colleagues and a fellow sociology professor at Johns Hopkins University shared:

> It was understood that the performance of poor children [both Black and White] lagged behind that of the majority of whites, and the thinking was that this was due to deficiencies in the schools they attended. Coleman used test score disparities as indicative of unequal opportunity and then sought to find the sources, looking beyond indicators of school quality. They introduced that idea as a way to understand educational inequality, and it was radical in its framing. (Dickinson, 2016, p. 3)

Prior to the conclusion of the Coleman Report, many had an assumption that the responsibility for education rested solely on teachers. In contradiction to this assumption, during an interview about the report's findings, Coleman stated, "a child's learning is a function more of the characteristics of his classmates than of those of the teacher" (Dickinson, 2016, p. 3). Furthermore, in the same interview, when responding to a question about class integration, Coleman stated:

> It would have been easy to accomplish class integration in the United States 100, or even 50, years ago when we didn't have the kind of residential segregation by class that we

> have now. In dense and large urban areas, class integration is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. What I think is needed in the long run is a new and totally different solution to what comprises a school. I would characterize this approach as a breaking apart of the school where some of the child's activities are carried out in one setting, others in another setting. Some of these activities would be class-integrated, but not all need be. When a child has a diverse array of educational settings, then it's not necessary for every one of those settings to be class-integrated. (King, 1972, p. 8)

Much of what Coleman surmised became foundational in the national development of school accountability.

In 1965 Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which resulted in significant public funding for primary and secondary education through Title programs (Beyer & Johnson, 2014). Since the passage of ESEA in 1965, there have been nine reauthorizations, the latest being ESSA (Kemp, 2020).

The premise of ESEA was to provide children from disadvantaged backgrounds with fair and equal opportunities to a good education. The Coleman Report, which was published in 1966, confirmed the need for educational accountability (Coleman, 1966). The report exposed large gaps in achievement between student demographics, especially in socioeconomic, race/ethnicity and gender groupings (Dickinson, 2016).

Influenced by The Coleman Report, in 1969 Congress implemented the only ongoing standardized national assessment called the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP; National Center of Education Statistics, 2009). This assessment is administered yearly to a representative sample group of students from across the United States. Students are assessed in mathematics, reading, science and writing. Results are organized and reported according to

gender, race/ethnicity, school location, socio-economic status, disabilities, English language learners, type of school, etc. Results are publicly aggregately reported and are known as The Nation's Report Card (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018, p. 1).

In 1979, President Jimmy Carter established the Department of Education as a cabinet level position. Its purpose was to support schools and the overall educational system at local, state, and national levels (Wallechinsky, 2016). President Carter appointed Shirley Hufstedler, a law practitioner, as the nation's first Secretary of Education (Education Week Library, 2017).

The second Secretary of Education, under President Ronald Reagan's leadership, was Terrel Howard Bell. T. H. Bell has strong ties in Utah, having been a teacher, Utah's Commissioner of Higher Education, and the superintendent of both Weber and Granite School Districts (College of Education, 2019).

In the 1980s, both Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush were involved in education reform, unintentionally expanding and arguably legitimizing the federal role in public education (Kosar, 2011, p. 7). Persuaded by T. H. Bell in 1981, President Reagan commissioned a study to assess the quality of education. The findings were published by Bell in 1983 and were titled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Kosar, 2011; U.S. National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Essentially, the report concluded that schools were underachieving on both national and international measures. In response to *A Nation at Risk*, President George H. W. Bush convened an education summit with the nation's governors in 1989, which resulted in the National Education Goals Panel (2002). During President Clinton's term of office, being influenced by the education summit, ESEA was reauthorized and updated in 1994 and was known as the *Improving America's Schools Act of 1994* (IASA; 1994). This reauthorization required states to report on disaggregated scores from state assessments of

academic achievement that compared various sub-groups of students. The report was known as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP; Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011). This federal public reporting requirement was the first of its kind and foundational to the current school grading/reporting requirement of school accountability (Congressional Research Service Report, 2009). Both presidents Bush and Clinton set educational goals for the country, with Bush stating that "Every student would leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency in English, mathematics, science, history, and geography" (Klein, 2014, p. 18).

These educational goals were reported annually through AYP to satisfy legal requirements under the "Parents' Right to Know" provisions. AYP reflected proficiency and growth scores from three categories of indicators: Reading/Language Arts, Mathematics, and Additional Academic Indicators (such as graduation and attendance rates). Assessment data were included on AYP reports from the following categories: All Students, Major Racial & Ethnic groups, Students with Disabilities, Limited English Proficient, Economically Disadvantaged, and while not among the required subgroups for AYP, data for the subgroups of Migrant and Gender were collected for reporting purposes only. AYP scores were reported on a state, district, and school level (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, pp. 10-12). Required reporting to parents was a precursor to current school grading requirements in ESSA.

As another reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which was passed in 2001 (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965; No Child Left Behind Act, 2001), more fully promoted standards-based education reform. It was based on the premise that individual educational outcomes would improve through setting high standards and establishing measurable goals. Through NCLB, the role of the federal government expanded even further. An emphasis was placed on more openly

published school report cards which included a report of annual academic progress based on annual testing.

Under NCLB, schools were held accountable for meeting benchmark standards in all the sub-group categories identified on AYP reporting: “If one group of disadvantaged students underperformed, the entire school was considered underperforming” and this led many educational leaders and teachers to feel fear because of school accountability reforms (Turner, 2015, p. 2).

School accountability reforms were implemented by all states as a punitive component of NCLB for schools that did not meet benchmark standards (Hanushek & Raymond, 2005). States both publicized school performance on state-mandated testing and attached consequences to that performance. The punitive measures for schools included provisions such as “identifying failing schools, replacing a principal, allowing students to enroll elsewhere, and the takeover, closure, or reconstitution of a school” (Dee & Jacob, 2009, p. 8). The consequences of these school accountability reforms were among the reasons for increasing public and educator discontent with NCLB.

With increasing public dissatisfaction for NCLB and nearing the end of his presidential tenure, President Barrack Obama reauthorized ESEA by initiating the ESSA in 2015 (Ujifusa, 2019). ESSA is currently being implemented under President Donald Trump’s Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos (Ujifusa, 2018). Standardized testing is still required as is a state-issued school report card. While ESSA still requires common compliance with various educational accountability measures such as implementing a school report card based on indicators in mandated subjects such as reading and math, provisions are included that allow greater autonomy for states to determine which type of school grading system and which additional

optional indicators are most appropriate for their state. ESSA was the first reauthorization of ESEA to narrow the federal government's role in education since the 1980s as a result of this shift of accountability from the federal to the state level.

ESSA requires five indicators of every state: academic *achievement* in reading and math; another academic indicator of a state's choosing, such as student *growth* in reading and math; four-year high school *graduation* rates, with the option to include extended-year rates to help struggling students graduate who may need another year or two; progress toward *English language proficiency* (ELP) as determined by individual states; and at least one (may be several) *indicator of school quality or student success* (state determined). The holistic approach to school grading finds opportunity in the fifth state-determined indicator. Federal suggestions have been offered for the fifth indicator, or measure of school quality or student success, to include indicators for student or educator engagement; student access to and completion of advanced coursework; student postsecondary readiness; school climate and safety; and other indicators that meet ESSA's requirements (Batel, 2017). Many states have chosen to maintain a narrow approach to school grading by not taking advantage of the holistic allowance that ESSA provides of allowing balance and variety in indicators that make up part of the overall grade a school receives.

From her formation, historically speaking, many would agree that the United States of America has experienced significant overall progress in school accountability and school grading (King, 2020). Policy analyst, Marga Mikulecky of the Education Commission of the States, reasoned that a national evolution in accountability efforts had occurred and as a result, student progress has improved over time (Mikulecky, 2014). Scholar Laura Jimenez, from the Center for American Progress, shared that ESSA promotes "a broader system for driving improvements and

supports" that includes "a broad set of measures for student success" (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017, p. 1). Michael Petrilli, the President of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, shared his perspective of the evolution of school accountability and pointed out that accountability is evolving and improving (Petrilli, 2019). While some would like to see increased federal control, many believe the United States is currently headed in a good direction, due to the reduction of the federal government's role in state educational accountability. Generally, however, based on an analysis of the research this study provides in section four, policy makers continue to lack a holistic vision of school accountability.

Historical Overview of Educational Accountability in Utah

While Utah became a U.S. territory as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), which brought an end to the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), those who lived in what was known as the Great Basin applied for statehood in 1849 (Internet Archive, 2010). Utah was not successful in applying for statehood five times (1849, 1856, 1862, 1872, 1882, and 1887; Lythgoe, 1996). Well before Utah became a state, during the Territory of Utah's 1851 1st Annual Legislative Session, the importance of establishing and funding an educational system was clearly a priority as evidenced by a request for financial support that was directed to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States Congress:

> Your memorialists, the Governor and Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah, feeling a deep interest in the promotion of a general system of education, and the general diffusion of knowledge among all classes; and laboring under the difficulties incident to the settlement of all new territories, and especially those so far removed from the confines of civilization; and feeling grateful to the General Government for the valuable Library furnished our Territory… and having no resources on which to base the

> establishment of a school fund, respectfully pray your honorable body to grant that the sum of twenty-four thousand dollars, appropriated for… the use and support of schools. (Utah Legislative Assembly, 1851, pp. 229-230)

This financial endowment was approved on 3 March 1852.

The first official charge in Utah for a report of a school came in 1890, when a public school report was required twice each year on school attendance, English language arts, and the system of public instruction (Utah Legislative Assembly, 1890, p. 111).

Utah eventually became a state in 1896 (Lythgoe, 1996) and the original Utah State Constitution addressed many issues pertaining to education. Some of the educational issues that were addressed included policy that required schools to be nonsectarian (Article III and X), open to all children of the State (Article X, section 1), free of charge (Article X, section 2), to provide financial benefit through the proceeds of all lands -later referred to as the Land Trust (Article III, section 3), and supervision given to a State Board of Education and others as approved and overseen by the State Legislature (Article X, section 8) (Smith, 1895). The Utah State Legislative Session of 1897, in addition to establishing a state office of education, required public reporting of school progress in Utah. The report was intended to be conducted annually so comparisons of multiple years of growth could be noted. The report included items such as "the condition of the school, the mental and moral instruction given, the methods employed by the teacher, and the progress of the pupils" (Utah 2nd Legislature, 1897, pp. 113-117). School discipline was an included measure. Holistic accountability was encouraged: "He shall see that the pupils are instructed in the several branches of study required by law to be taught in the schools, as far as they are qualified to pursue them" (Utah 2nd Legislature, 1897, pp. 113-117).

While there were certainly annual academic achievement assessments administered previously, in 1999, Utah began to administer statewide criterion-referenced assessments, beginning with the Criterion-Referenced Test, often called CRTs, for grades 3-11. These tests evaluated English language arts, math, and science. In addition to the CRTs that were required for all grades (3-11), in March 1999 the Utah legislature passed House Bill 33 which required an expanded mandatory "basic-skills" assessment program. This new law required assessment in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11 and included a comparison report taken from a national sample. The assessment was called Utah Performance Assessment System for Students. The Utah Basic Skills Competency Test was administered to high school students, grades 10-12 and was administered from 2006 until 2013 (Schaeffer, 2016). The Direct Writing Assessment was first administered in 2003 to grades 6 and 9 (later 5 and 8) (Goerts & Duffy, 2001). The SAT9 was used for a few years and required assessment in reading, mathematics, language, science, and social studies.

In determining student proficiency, the Utah State Office of Education switched from requiring the SAT9 to the ITBS (Iowa Test of Basic Skills) in 2005 (Schaeffer, 2016). Time and money were among the reasons for the switch. The ITBS required about half the amount of time to administer as the SAT9 did and the SAT9 was also less expensive. The ITBS assessed students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11 in the subjects of reading, language arts, math, social studies, and science. These norm-referenced assessments assessed students in vocabulary, word analysis, reading comprehension, listening, language, mathematics, social studies, science, and sources of information. Assessment results were made available in the form of raw scores, percent correct, grade equivalent, developmental standard score, and percentile rank. Districts and schools would use the summary data to guide curriculum and instructional planning (Colby & Yudof, 2005; Glavin, 2020).

As NCLB continued to be implemented, many showed continued support, as evidenced by bipartisan support and the collaboration of civil rights and business groups (Klein, 2015). One of the creators and the spokesperson for NCLB was the United States Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings. She stated:

> For the first time ever, we are holding ourselves accountable for ensuring every child—regardless of race, income or special need—can read and do math on grade level. The latest nation's education report card shows we're on the right track, but we must pick up the pace to close the achievement gap and get every child to grade level or above by 2014. (Colby & Yudof, 2005, p. 3; Wertheimer, 2010)

Even with many initial supporters, however, criticism increased for NCLB. Even Secretary Spellings stated, “The name No Child Left Behind sadly did become a toxic brand” (Wertheimer, 2010, p. 2). In addition to sanctions that were considered by many to be unreasonable, one of the major points of criticism was with the goal that every child would be proficient by the year 2014. Educators and state officials argued that as desirable and altruistic as that goal was, it was unrealistic. In response to this increasing controversy, Patti Harrington, Utah State School Superintendent stated:

> No Child Left Behind is a flawed federal law. The tenets of the law, of course, we agree with enormously. We believe in the philosophy entirely in Utah. But when you get to the details, it's very difficult to live with the law and to make sense of it as it relates to helping children succeed. The law is based upon a premise that's inaccurate. It's based upon the premise that all kids will be proficient by the year 2014. That's unrealistic and, in my vocabulary, it's very ludicrous, as well. (Holman, 2005, p. 1)

In 2006, 20 states requested to join a pilot for NCLB Growth Models. Utah was among those but was not selected as one of the pilot participants. The growth model pilot was designed to "test whether growth-based accountability models show promise as a fair and reliable way of measuring improvement and holding schools accountable for achievement under the law" (Olson, 2006, p. 2). Those at the federal levels of government were not completely closed to the idea. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings said:

> We're open to new ideas, but we're not taking our eye off the ball. There are many different routes for states to take, but they all must begin with a commitment to annual assessment and disaggregation of data. And they all must lead to closing the achievement gap and every student reaching grade level by 2014. This is good policy for all students, and we must stick with it. (Colby & Yudof, 2005, p. 1)

Some considered this ongoing controversy to be the beginning of the end of NCLB.

In March 2011, Utah created the Utah Comprehensive Accountability System (UCAS), which was charged with the following guiding principles:

1. Promote progress toward and achievement of college and career readiness
2. Value both meeting standards (proficiency) and improving academic achievement (growth)
3. All schools, including those that serve traditionally low performing students, should have an opportunity to demonstrate success
4. Strong incentives for schools to improve achievement for the lowest performing students
5. Growth expectations for non-proficient students should be linked to attaining proficiency

6. Growth expectations for all students, including students above proficiency, should be appropriately challenging and meaningful
7. Clear and understandable to stakeholders

The UCAS was intended to be a way to provide a clear reporting of school performance using indicators and measures that were already established (Utah State Office of Education, 2012).

A school grading bill passed in 2011, which required letter grades to be assigned annually to schools throughout Utah (Utah State Board of Education, 2013). School grades were based primarily on growth and performance measures from statewide assessments (Utah State Office of Education, 2013).

As discontentment throughout the United States increased with NCLB, in 2011 President Obama authorized ESEA flexibility, with the intent that improvements would be shown in academic achievement and quality of instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Some feel this formality was a precursor that led to the implementation of the current ESSA. Even prior to the bipartisan ESSA in 2015, several states began to take advantage of this authorized flexibility and implemented indicators and measures to promote a more holistic educational approach of school accountability.

As written in ESSA law, in determining school accountability, there are five required indicators:

1. Academic *achievement* in reading and math
2. Another academic indicator, such as student *growth* in reading and math
3. Four-year high school *graduation* rates, with the option to include extended-year rates
4. Progress toward *English language proficiency* (ELP)
5. At least one *measure of school quality or student success (state determined)*

While not required, federal suggestions have been offered for the fifth indicator. These include student or educator engagement; student access to and completion of advanced coursework; student postsecondary readiness; school climate and safety; and other measures that meet ESSA's requirements (Batel, 2017, p. 2). Under these guidelines, ample flexibility is afforded to states-- a drastic change from the policies of previous decades.

Utah Legislators have the challenge of aligning past and current state law with federal law. To build this alignment between ESSA and Utah State Law (State S.B. 220), Utah has adopted and defined measures that align with ESSA mandates, as well as a few other indicators. In a direction approximating holistic education, the Utah State Board of Education described this effort: "These additional indicators are intended to expand the definition of successful schools and capture more of the work schools do to help students" (Utah State Board of Education, 2019c, p. 6). These additional indicators include growth scores in science, language arts, and math, proficiency scores in science, English learner progress, and growth of the lowest performing 25% of students.

Along with the annual school grade report that was implemented in 2011, Utah recently provided schools the option to choose and describe up to two additional pieces of information about how each school is supporting students. This was first included in the school report card for the 2018-2019 school year. The Utah State Board of Education explained, "These self-reported indicators are not factored into school accountability calculations, but provide the opportunity for schools to highlight successful programs or practices in addition to the indicators included in school accountability" (Utah State Board of Education, 2019b, p. 1). Although these self-reported indicators were not factored into a school's letter grade, this was a positive step for

Utah in reporting on and including direction towards more holistically representing school accountability.

Due to flexibility afforded in ESSA plans, there was a wide variety of indicators and measures included in state plans across the United States. States were given great latitude in determining which indicators to use, how those indicators are evaluated, and the weight ascribed to each indicator that determines the school grade. While this is further explained and analyzed in the Findings and Discussion section of this study, some of these indicators included reducing chronic absenteeism, general attendance, lower grade literacy, English language proficiency, accelerated learners, science, student engagement, community service learning, computer science, suspension/discipline rate, physical fitness, fine arts, performing arts, social studies, classroom organization, emotional support, world languages, early childhood education, school climate, library education, lowest performing students growth, student engagement, Spanish-language proficiency, military readiness, writing, and equity (Education Week Research Center, 2018, p. 1).

> Beyond school ratings, state accountability systems are somewhat abstract at the school and classroom levels. SEAs [State Education Agency] tend to leverage accountability systems to incentivize behaviors that improve outcomes for students and facilitate equitable access to high-quality educational opportunities. However, there often exists a gap between the intended system impact and how behaviors change. (D'Brot, 2018, p. 2)

Assessments, School Grading, and Reporting

A school grading bill passed in the 2011 Utah legislative session (53A-1-1101), which required letter grades to be assigned to schools throughout Utah (Utah State Board of Education,

2013, p. 1). School grades were based primarily on growth and performance measures from statewide assessments (Utah State Office of Education, 2013).

In 2013, Utah's governor, Gary Herbert, made recommendations to the Utah legislature for education and economic development. The measurable component of the plan was for 66% of all working-age Utahns to achieve a post-secondary degree or certificate by 2020 (Herbert, 2013). This plan, implemented in 2014, included performance goals for kindergarten through college. To outline and support these goals, an annual PACE report was provided for the public, which featured four key aspects (Jordan High School, 2015):

- P - Prepare Young Learners
- A – Access for All Students
- C – Complete Certificates and Degrees
- E – Economic Alignment

Associated with PACE are key assessment and performance goals:

- 90% proficiency in 3rd grade Reading
- 90% proficiency in 3rd grade Math
- 90% proficiency in 6th grade Reading/Language Arts
- 90% proficiency in 6th grade Math
- 90% of students reaching a composite score of 18 on the ACT
- 90% high school graduation rate

At the end of the 2013-2014 school year, computer adaptive testing became a required component of annual assessment tests in Utah and was implemented with the criterion-referenced SAGE test (Student Assessment of Growth and Excellence). Schools were again given a publicly reported letter grade annually based on achievement (student proficiency) and

growth (student improvement) scores of students in grades 3-10, as assessed in language arts, mathematics, and science (Utah State Board of Education, 2019c). However, while report cards were still published, due to test interruptions and inaccuracies in reporting, the issuance of letter grades was suspended for the 2018-2019 school year (Utah State Board of Education, 2019a). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Utah schools canceled end-of-year testing in 2020. It remains to be seen how or if school report cards will be issued.

In 2015, coinciding with the implementation of another reauthorization of ESEA (1965), or the ESSA 2015, Utah schools began providing a new assessment called RISE (Readiness Improvement Success Empowerment) to students in grades 3-8. RISE replaced the SAGE test. Like the SAGE test, achievement and growth in language arts, math, science, as well as English learner progress and the growth of the lowest performing 25% were factored into percentages that equate to a letter grade. ESSA policy requires 95% participation rates on the state test, and this is in conflict with Utah's law to allow students to opt out of testing. In 2017, for instance, Utah was below the 95% allowance for participation, with 5.9% of students who opted out of state testing. Many schools in Utah took a hit on their school report cards because when test participation rates drop below 95%, students are counted as if they took the state assessments and received a score of zero (Wood, 2018).

For elementary and middle schools, Utah requires counted students to be enrolled for the entire school year and allots 150 total possible points for school accountability based on every eligible student who is tested. Each of the four indicator areas, Achievement, Growth, Growth of the Lowest Performing 25%, and English Learner (EL) Progress are each given a weight value that equates to an overall score that a school may receive for students assessed in grades 3-8 in the areas of mathematics, English language arts, and science. Each subject area, Math, Science,

and English Language Arts are allotted one third of the total points, or 18.667 points for each area. The combined total possible for these three areas is 56 points in both the Academic Achievement and the Academic Growth indicator areas.

Academic Achievement is allotted a total of 56 points possible. This amount accounts for 37% of the total points possible for schools, as demonstrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Formula for Determining Achievement Points for School Grading

$$Achievement\ Points = \left(\frac{Number\ of\ proficient\ scores}{Total\ number\ of\ scores}\right) x\ 56$$

Note. (Utah State Board of Education (2019c, p. 17).

Academic Growth is a measurement of student annual academic performance regardless of present levels of proficiency. Academic Growth is allotted 56 possible points, accounting for 37% of the total points possible. The formula for Growth points is demonstrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Formula for Determining Growth Points for School Grading

$$Growth\ Points = \left(\frac{Summed\ weights\ for\ all\ students\ and\ subjects}{Total\ number\ of\ scores}\right) x\ 56$$

Note. Utah State Board of Education (2019c, p. 19).

Growth of the Lowest 25% of students in a school, also referred to as the lowest quartile (LQ) group, is also determined by comparisons of annual testing results from statewide assessments. There are 25 possible points allotted to this category. Student Growth Percentiles

(SGP) convey a student's growth from the prior year. The calculation for this category is conveyed in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Formula for Determining Points Growth of the Lowest 25% of Students

$$Growth\ of\ of\ LQ\ Points = \left(\frac{LQ\ students\ with\ SGP\ of\ \geq 40}{All\ students\ in\ the\ LQ\ group}\right) x\ 25$$

Note. Utah State Board of Education (2019c, [/ 20).

English Learner (EL) Progress is a measure of English language development and proficiency of EL students. Students are considered to achieve English proficiency when they have achieved a score of 5.0 on the annually administered WIDA ACCESS assessment. The WIDA ACCESS assessment evaluates reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Calculations for initial grade level, initial English language proficiency level, and the time enrolled in school are considered. Figure 4 shows the formula for the points allotted in this category.

Figure 4

Formula for Determining Points for English Learner (EL) Progress

$$Points = \left(\frac{Number\ of\ ELs\ making\ adequate\ progress + ELs\ reaching\ proficiency}{Total\ number\ of\ current\ EL\ students - first\ year\ ELs}\right) x\ 13$$

Note. Utah State Board of Education (2019c, p. 21).

For schools with fewer than 10% English language learners, the EL Progress indicator is removed, and the remaining three indicators receive greater weight as indicated in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Points and Weighing of Indicators for Elementary/Middle Schools

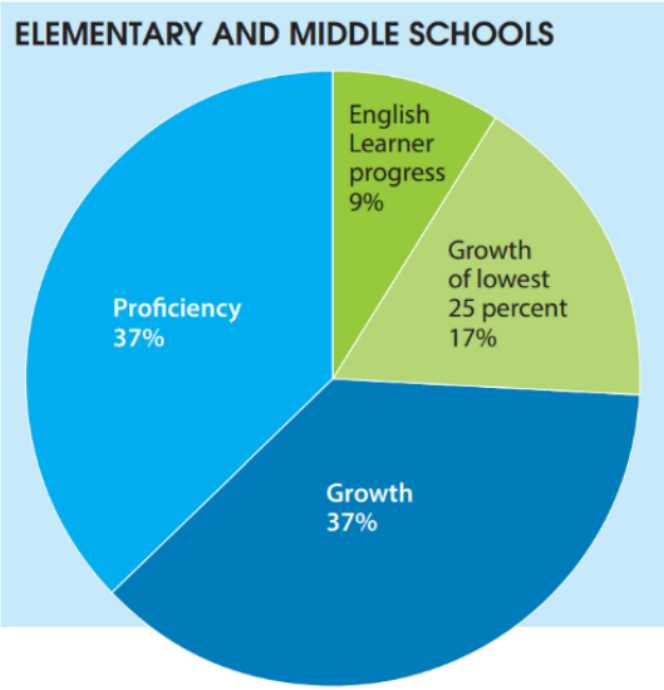
Indicator	Points	Percentage of Total	*Percentage with <10 ELs*
Achievement	56	37%	*41%*
Growth	56	37%	*41%*
EL Progress	13	9%	--
Growth of Lowest Performing 25%	25	17%	*18%*
Total	150	100%	*100%*

Note. Utah State Board of Education (2019c, p. 10).

A summary of points and weighting of indicators for elementary and middle schools is portrayed in *Figure 6.*

Figure 6

Summary of Points and Weighting of Indicators for Elementary and Middle Schools in Utah



Note. Utah State Board of Education (2019c, p. 16).

While letter grades may not technically be issued until the release of the 2020-2021 report card, the designation for the letter grades has been given and will likely apply to the school report card that results from the 2018-2019 assessment. This is still undecided as details from the cancelation of testing and issues surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic are not yet determined. However, based on Utah Code 53E-5-204, overall elementary and middle school ratings are defined based on the 150 possible points:

A – EXEMPLARY; 63.25% of the total points earned

B – COMMENDABLE; 57% of the total points earned

C – TYPICAL; 43.5% of the total points earned

D – DEVELOPING; 38% of the total points earned

F – CRITICAL; less than 8% of the total points earned

Schools received the descriptive rating (exemplary, commendable, etc.) without the associated letter grade for the assessment results from the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years (Utah State Board of Education, 2019c, pp. 9, 27). It is unknown at this time if letter grades will be issued for the 2019-2020 school year because annual assessments were not administered due to COVID-19 complications.

Scholarly Perspectives on Holistic School Accountability

Many education scholars have strong opinions as to whether school accountability measures should be more holistic or more focused. Supporting holistic education, Dr. Jane Hannaway and Dr. W. James Popham claim that while standardized testing is adequate in determining school quality, Hannaway and Hamilton argues that educators respond to incentives that promote assessed indicators which cause other learning goals to have less focus (Hannaway & Hamilton, 2008). Popham points out that standardized tests are the chief indicator by which

most communities judge a school's success and that other knowledge often goes unrecognized (Popham, 1999).

Dr. M. Francis Klein argues the balance of effective curriculum decision-making requires collaboration at all levels -state, district, local community, site administrators, teachers, and even students. She emphasizes that educational approaches should be "effective, relevant, balanced, and current" (Klein, 1991, pp. 223-224).

Dr. Mindy L. Kornhaber and Dr. Helen Ladd promote holistic or well-rounded approaches to school accountability. Dr. Kornhaber supports a holistic accountability stance by pointing out her concerns with NCLB, which include work-arounds, narrowing of curriculum, over-emphasis on the bottom line, and the need for multiple indicators (Sunderman, 2007). Dr. Ladd supports the idea that school accountability design matters and should include policies and strategies that would result in a more balanced accountability system instead of just focusing on test scores (Ladd, 2007). Dr. Ladd's standards-based reform movement supports the overall premise of equality of education that is promoted through ESEA by emphasizing educational attainment for all students, especially those from diverse socio-economic status (Ladd, 2007). Dr. Ladd also co-chairs a diverse group of policymakers and scholars who promote an approach called a Broader, Bolder Approach (BBA) to education policy. She "calls for school accountability that creates incentives to deliver a broad and well-rounded curriculum, including the arts, science, history, health and physical education, and character development" (Calderon, 2010, p. 1).

Other educators and scholars promote educational focus and evaluation that supports a holistic approach. Dr. Henry Levin calls for a greater focus on non-cognitive school outcomes, such as interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and capabilities as well as cognitive outcomes

(Levin, 2012). Joshua P. Starr believes in school accountability based on balance through a variety of indicators. In support of this stance, Starr stated:

> Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, states and districts do have opportunities to collect and use data that go well beyond the traditional standardized tests. In particular, many school and system leaders are experimenting with complementary indicators that focus on social-emotional learning and career-readiness, topics that resonate with parents and can help place standardized test scores in context. (Starr, 2017, pp. 72-73)

Dr. Craig Hochbein argues in favor of a holistic approach to school grading. He declared:

> Ironically, the solution to the school grading problem is more measurement, not less. Current measurement and grading of academic performance only provide information about a single facet of the operation of a school. This singular focus not only facilitates manipulation, but also ignores inherent differences in schools and devalues the multitude of expectations demanded from schools… So, how do we improve things? If school constituents value an activity, I'd recommend that they find ways to measure it. For instance, how many students visited the city museum for the first time in their lives? What was the attendance at fine arts performances? How many hours do teachers spend beyond contract requirements? How many backpacks were sent home full of food? Then, value these measured activities by reporting results to important stakeholders. (Hochbein, 2013, p. 2)

Betsy DeVos, the U.S. Secretary of Education, promotes the vision that there should be flexibility in the state ESSA plans (Phenicie, 2018). Several scholars support the whole child and whole school community approach in school assessment. In support of taking advantage of the flexibility to adopt a variety of indicators under the ESSA plans is senior policy analyst

Samantha Batel. Referring to state ESSA plans, Batel shared, “These classifications are just one small part of effective accountability systems. A broad array of indicators of student and school success—that may not be appropriate to include in the classification system—can and should be used to inform improvement supports” (Batel, 2017, p. 15).

In contrast to those who supported holistic education, there were those who were generally in opposition. For instance, Dr. Marshall S. Smith and Dr. Susan Fuhrman support a standards-based reform movement. They promote setting ambitious standards to a set of core academic subjects and aligning instruction and professional development towards the mastery of testing of these subjects (Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1991). In addition, Dr. Paul Milgrom and Dr. John Roberts promote a narrow focus of only a few school goals (Milgrom & Roberts, 1994). Perhaps without fully realizing it, many of Utah’s State Legislators and State School Board Members, educational policy makers, join this group by promoting a less holistic and primarily standards-based approach to school grading. This is evidenced by the limited variety of indicators included and required in Utah’s ESSA plan.

Scholars are essentially divided into two groups: those who favor holistic approaches in education and those who do not. Those who favor holistic approaches generally support the idea that a well-rounded education will result in a society that is more balanced, while those who promote a more targeted approach generally place higher value on specific measures, such as mathematics or language arts than they do on other measures. These two perspectives are paramount to the approaches state legislators and school boards support. The best approach remains subjective. The findings in this study provide information worthy of considering as school grading proposals are developed and revised.

Summary

Addressing school accountability is challenging at best. Many of our required school accountability measures and publicly reported grading systems portray a narrow approach that promotes and reflects on only a few academic disciplines such as math, language, and science proficiency. ESSA allows states the opportunity to choose and broaden the selection of academic indicators and other measures that determine school grades. As will be shown in the next section, states, including Utah, are not taking full advantage of what the law allows by choosing to implement a strategic variety of indicators that collectively would provide a more accurate portrayal of school accountability. While Utah and other states certainly collect data and measure more than what is required from ESSA, the data that is not required by the state's ESSA plan is not formulated in the grade schools receive on their state issued school report card. Policy makers in Utah and other states should consider whether their approach in complying with ESSA guidelines is limiting academic and non-academic learning due to endorsing a narrow approach of school accountability by implementing the minimum, or near minimum, that is required of ESSA.

ESSA allows greater school accountability autonomy for individual states. The diverse approaches among the 50 states to meet the mandates for ESSA could be significant. Drawing conclusions from the commonality as well as the differences in indicators and measures will yield interesting results that have the potential to influence the accountability belief system of groups and individuals who influence school accountability decisions.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Description of Methodology

This descriptive study incorporating archival research reviewed K-8 school grading systems. The components of these systems with their indicators were collected and compared from two sequential time periods: first, referred to as "pre-ESSA," is the time period after NCLB and before ESSA plans were approved and second, current data from approved and currently implemented state ESSA plans, referred to as the "current ESSA" time period. The collection of this data is intended to help state education policy makers, such as members of the State Board of Education and State Legislators determine the following:

1. What are the state school grading systems and indicators that were in use just prior to ESSA), as well as those that are currently in place through ESSA, by all 50 states plus Washington, D.C.?
2. Does a comparison of the optional indicators found in each state's plan during these two time periods reflect a trend towards holistic approaches to school grading?
3. What state level school grading system and indicators were and are being implemented by the state of Utah?
4. Are Utah elementary and middle schools (K-8) being held accountable for indicators in Utah's state school grading system that represent a holistic approach?

Nature of Data

As NCLB was superseded by ESSA in 2015, but not yet clearly defined, states created, on their own, indicators and measures and systems for public school reporting. This post-NCLB (pre-ESSA) data revealed information pertaining to state-issued school grades and public

reporting systems. This research also identified the various indicators implemented by each state for grading schools. A variety of approaches for school ratings existed among the states, such as A-F letter grades, point index systems, tiered rating systems, dashboard coding, and categorical ratings (Education Week Research Center, 2018). Please refer to the School Grading Systems (Differentiation Methods) Domain on page 48 for more information.

Regarding grading schools, ESSA guidelines state that "Every state is required to annually differentiate across all schools." This is the federal way of saying states must be able to compare schools by issuing publicly reported ratings or a school grading system such as A-F grading, numerical rating, categorical ratings like "Superior" or "Exceeds," or a "Star" system, or any of the other measures previously mentioned. Alternatively, some states are pursuing some form of a data dashboard that reports the results of individual measures annually (English, 2017). In addition, since there are similar indicators that are required in all state ESSA plans, such as academic achievement in reading and math, and progress toward English language proficiency (ELP), less focus was given to those areas in this study. Of special interest to this study was determining, comparing, and contrasting the additional indicators, commonly referred to as the fifth indicator. This fifth indicator is formally described as, "at least one measure of school quality or student success" (Batel, 2017). States could simply do the minimum and report on one additional indicator, or they could take greater advantage of what the law allows and report on multiple indicators. This study compiled and organized the data of this fifth indicator from all 50 states to determine if the fifth indicator(s) promoted a more holistic measure of accountability.

Source of the Data and Data Collection

Researching federal and state archival data were determined to be the most accurate and productive primary sources for acquiring relevant data, such as that found from the U.S.

Department of Education (www.ed.gov) and the Utah State Board of Education (www.schools.utah.gov). Other data were compared and verified from a variety of sources, such as the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Education Commission of the States, The Alliance for Excellent Education, Education Week, and Achieve (Achieve, 2020; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2020; Education Commission of the States, 2018; Klein, 2017; Wright & Petrilli, 2017). Data were compared and verified and were found to be consistent; however, data sources sometimes reported with differing emphasis depending on the source's focus or purpose.

Individual state ESSA plans were reviewed to determine the indicators and measures that each state chose to implement, as well as how states determined to differentiate between schools (public reporting of school grading). The data represented goals, indicators, and measures for schools in grades K-8. Since ESSA requirements are significantly different for 9-12 grade schools, this study focused primarily on data that corresponds with K-8 grade schools. In considering the federal ESSA requirements of public reporting for schools and the flexibility afforded to states to decide additional indicators and measures, the intent of this study was to compare the information gathered from the 50 states during these two time periods with the letter grade reporting, indicators, and measures implemented in Utah (Utah State Board of Education, 2019c).

The information about state plans and the data necessary for this study were acquired from archival sources. Archival research is described "as research involving primary sources held in an archives, a Special Collections library, or other repository" (Georgia State University, 2019). From the Society of American Archivists, Richard Pearce-Moses deducts, "Archival sources can be manuscripts, documents, records, objects, sound and audiovisual materials, or other materials" (Pearce-Moses, 2005, pp. 24-34).

Data Analysis

Analysis includes comparisons of indicators, measures, and school grading systems found in both current state ESSA plans as well as those used after the conclusion of NCLB and prior to the implementation of current ESSA plans. In order to ensure analysis integrity, the findings from this study were organized in a manner that is similar to the organizational method found in an article from the Center for American Progress, by Samantha Batel. Batel categorized and analyzed indicators from ESSA plans from 17 states (Batel, 2017). Batel portrayed ESSA indicators as they are required in the five following areas:

1. Academic achievement in reading and math
2. Another academic indicator, such as student growth in reading and math
3. Four-year high school graduation rates, with the option to include extended-year rates
4. Progress toward English language proficiency (ELP)
5. At least one measure of school quality or student success (state determined)

While this study's reporting approach is similar, there is variation in the approach of this study from Batel's study. This study focused on school grading systems and reporting of comparison of indicators from the pre-ESSA and current ESSA time periods of indicators for grades K-8. Batel's study also focused on indicators and measures but focused more heavily on high school, or grades 9-12. She also omitted reference to school grading and locally determined indicators, while these are included in this study.

Grading systems and indicators, as well as state level school grading systems used during pre-ESSA and current-ESSA time periods were charted and graphed using Excel as a platform to visually portray and quantify where states had commonalities and differences in their plans. One of the primary results of this study allows conclusions to be made to determine whether states are

using the flexibility given to them by the federal government through ESSA to address a holistic representation of school accountability and to give a comparative analysis of not only the number of indicators used, but also the nature of the indicators (academic, non-academic, attendance, SEL, etc.).

To assist in determining if Utah elementary and middle schools (K-8) are being held accountable for measures that represent holistic approaches to Utah's school grading system, data from these two time periods were compared to determine which measure or measures each state used to publicly report school ratings, as well as to determine if each state increased or decreased the number of indicators required. Indicators were then organized into subcategories, as described below.

Since it is required for each state to have at least one indicator as the fifth indicator (measure(s) of school quality or student success), this study considers any indicator from the pre-ESSA period, as well as the fifth indicator(s) from approved current ESSA plans as indicators of school quality or student success, so long as the indicators are calculated into the matrix that is used for determining publicly reported school ratings and are not included in ESSA's first four required indicators. In a study from the Center for American Progress by K-12 education policy analyst Samantha Batel, an overview of school classification indicators under ESSA was examined (Batel, 2017). Batel's study grouped indicators to clarify her findings. In considering the approach she took in her study, and in order to make sense of the less-than-specific ESSA requirements, it was determined that the indicators implemented by the various states clearly fit into five categories: Early Warning, Well-Rounded Education, Culture and Climate, Other Assessment Measures, and Locally Determined. Every state included at least two indicators from the five categories. The indicators implemented in state ESSA plans seemed to fit logically

within the first four indicators categories. The fifth indicator category, Locally Determined Indicators, originated in the pre-ESSA plans from six states: Alabama, Connecticut, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, and Nevada. Utah also began giving schools the option to report on a locally determined indicator in the 2019-2020 school year. In Utah, these are referred to as Self-Reported Indicators, and although their progress was reported on each school's report card, they had no influence on the grade a school received. Therefore, this study assigned the school quality or student success indicators to one of the five categories below:

1. Early Warning Indicators (attendance or chronic absenteeism)
2. Well-Rounded Education (inclusion of fine or performing arts, physical education, world languages, computer science, health, library, science, and social studies)
3. Culture and Climate (school environment/climate, behavior or suspensions, class size, teacher quality, early intervention programs, and social-emotional learning)
4. Other Assessment Measures (gifted and talented programs, minimally proficient, students with disabilities, military or workforce readiness, transition or high school readiness, and test participation rates)
5. Locally Determined Indicators (These indicators may categorically fit into one of the first four indicator categories, but since they are "locally determined," they are designated into this unique indicator category.

The national comparison of state data from these two time periods was contrasted with Utah's data to help policy makers in Utah draw conclusions about Utah's focus regarding indicators and measures used to determine school grading.

Structural Holes

Two main patterns or potential "structural holes" are recognized from the research. First, even though the same ESSA guidelines are given to all states, state elementary and middle school accountability systems vary greatly in the complexity of their plans, the public reporting methods used, and in chosen indicators with accompanying weights ascribed to each indicator. Second, regarding the pre-ESSA and current-ESSA time periods, there was a fair amount of research confusion in distinguishing between past, current, and proposed elementary and middle school accountability systems on state web sites. State websites were in transition to conform to the new ESSA guidelines and were at different stages of implementation. There may be additional ongoing changes that could have implications of a holistic approach to school grading because some states are considering revising their ESSA plans (Botel, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2010; Utah State Board of Education, 2018). Even Utah has considered changing from the A-F school grading system to a data dashboard system. Representative Marie Poulson recently introduced HB0175 and on 12 February 2020, it passed the House but was rejected by the Senate (H.B. 175 Education Accountability Amendments, 2020). This is still a hot issue and changes are likely to be considered in the future.

In addition to the two identified main patterns or potential structural holes, one cannot dismiss the possibility of confirmatory bias, or what is referred to as the "halo effect" (Bhat, 2020, p. 7). The halo effect, a term coined by the psychologist Edward Thorndike, is a cognitive bias in one's impressions and considers the possibility that the researcher may have a potential bias towards the research topic (Nayak, 2020). While intentional effort was made to counter this by collecting factual data without interjecting opinions, it would be short-sighted to not consider this as a potential structural hole.

In addressing the two main structural holes in the research, it was decided that the most effective approach to meet the purposes of this study was to address the variation in the state plans by recognizing the indicators found on pre-ESSA state education web sites. This distinguishing information alone could prove to be valuable to elementary and middle school policy makers.

Summary

Implemented in this work are the methods that portray a descriptive study of archival data of grades K-8 school grading systems and indicators, as well as state level school grading systems. Data are collected and compared from right after NCLB, referred to as pre-ESSA with current state ESSA plans, referred to as current-ESSA. Special focus was given to identify and compare what is regarded as ESSA's 5th indicator. The results of this study will arm school policy makers with information from state ESSA plans from across the country that may help make a determination as to whether implemented indicators and measures represent holistic approaches in evaluating K-8 schools.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

The presentation of the results of this study are organized around the study's four research questions:

1. What are the state school grading systems and indicators that were in use just prior to ESSA), as well as those that are currently in place through ESSA, by all 50 states plus Washington, D.C.?
2. Does a comparison of the optional indicators found in each state's plan during these two time periods reflect a trend towards holistic approaches to school grading?
3. What state level school grading system and indicators were and are being implemented by the state of Utah?
4. Are Utah elementary and middle schools (K-8) being held accountable for indicators in Utah's state school grading system that represent a holistic approach?

Data from two time periods were collected and analyzed. The first period, labeled "pre-ESSA" represents the time period after NCLB and prior to the approval of state ESSA plans. The data in the pre-ESSA time period was retrieved from 2016-2017. The second time period, labeled "current-ESSA" represents the time period after the approval of state ESSA plans, up until the end of the 2019-2020 school year.

For each of the two time periods, comparative data are presented for two major domains: School Grading Systems (Differentiation Methods), and Indicators. Within the Indicator category, there are five specific indicators: Early Warning, Well-Rounded Education, Culture and Climate, Other Assessments, and Locally Determined. This information is presented with tables and figures as noted under each indicator.

School Grading Systems (Differentiation Methods) Domain

Since states are required to publicly report annually on school quality through a state-determined school grading system, research was conducted to determine how states were meeting this requirement. What emerged from the research was that school grading systems implemented by the states could be categorized in five different approaches or methods of school grading: A-F Grading, Numerical Rating, Categorical Rating, Star System, and Data Dashboard. The data reflected a shift in the type of school grading system (a.k.a. differentiation method) in use from pre-ESSA to the current ESSA period. The method used by each state during pre-ESSA and current ESSA periods are displayed and compared in Figure 7, *School Grading Systems*.

Figure 7

School Grading Systems (Differentiation Methods): Comparison of Two Time Periods

Summary of data: Pre-ESSA and Current ESSA Methods of Differentiation

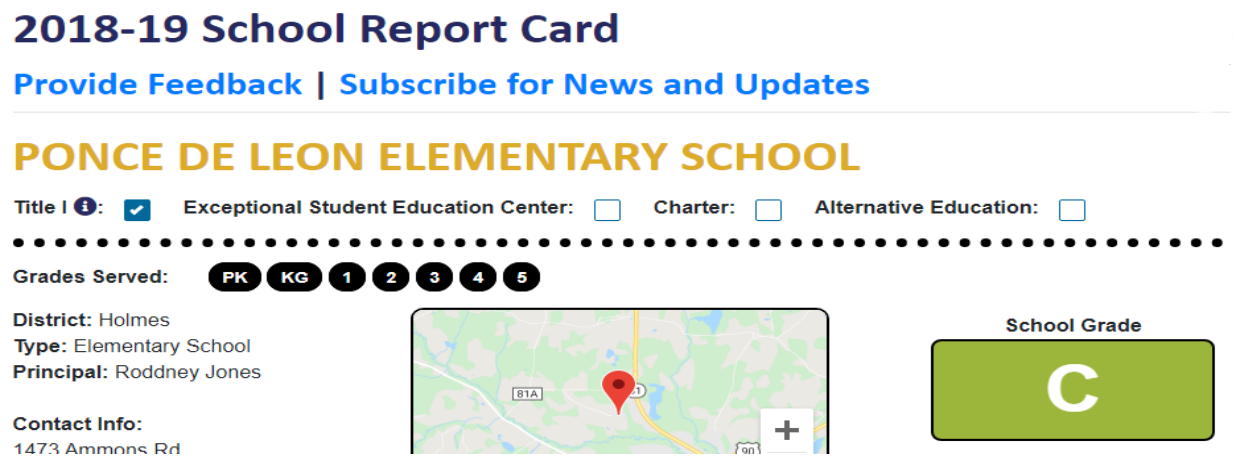
Differentiation Method	Pre-ESSA	Current ESSA	Change
A-F Grading	17	14	-3
Numerical Rating	6	10	+4
Categorical Rating	5	16	+11
Star System	1	5	+4
Data Dashboard	22	6	-16

A-F Grading

States that choose to differentiate through an A-F school grading system do so primarily because these ratings are familiar and popular with parents. Similar to how many teachers traditionally issue grades to students, states that use this method allocate a weight to areas being assessed and create a formula that quantifies and translates into a letter grade (ExcelinEd, 2016). For example, see Figure 7. Additional school information may be found through sites linking to most report cards.

Figure 8

Florida A-F Report Card



Note. (Florida State Department of Education, 2019).

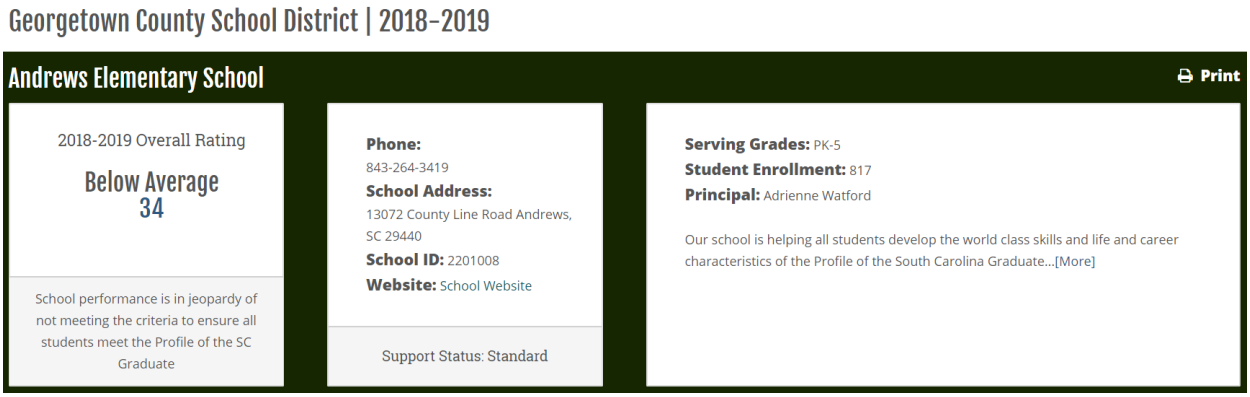
As shown in Figure 7, A-F grading scheme showed a decline when comparing two periods of school grading methods.It was unexpected that there would be a decline of three fewer states implementing A-F school grading as this method seemed very common and more likely to be accepted because of its familiarity.

Numerical Rating

Numerical Rating is similar in function to A-F grading, in that this scheme symbolically assigns some value description, in this case, numerical, to schools. Comparisons between schools (differentiation) are facilitated due to the numerical assignment as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 9

South Carolina Numerical Rating Report Card



Note. (South Carolina Department of Education, 2020).

While additional information such as academic achievement, English learners' progress, student progress, achievement towards state goals, student engagement, class environment, student safety, and financial data are available on other portions of South Carolina's school report cards, the numerical rating of 34 was given to this school after considering the weighted requirements determined by the state (South Carolina Department of Education, 2020). The number 34 was given, which is determined to be below average. Each state includes various additional information that may or may not be weighted on a school's given grade.

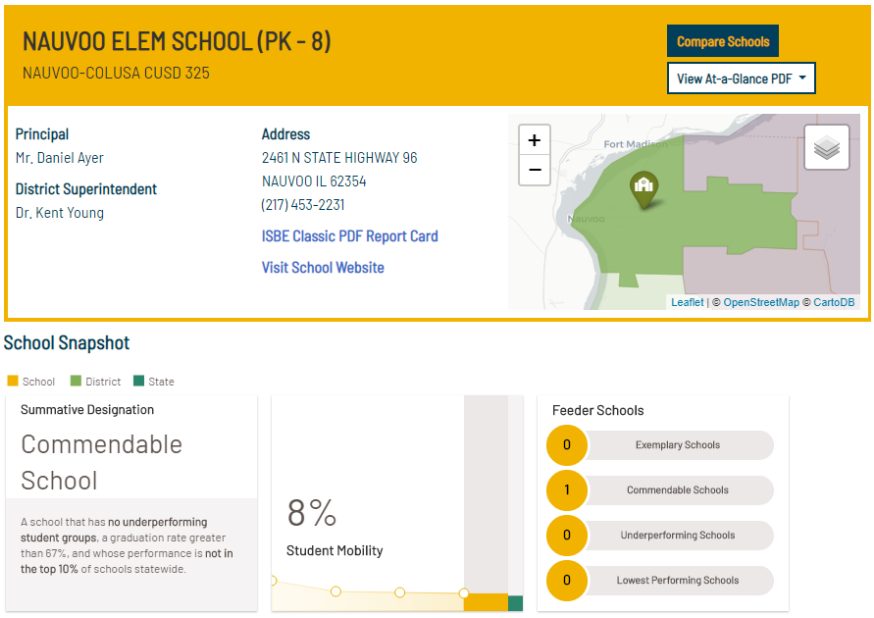
Figure 7 also portrays the change from six states implementing the numerical rating scheme during the pre-ESSA period to 10 states during the current ESSA period. The number of states implementing the numerical rating scheme increased by four.

Categorical Rating

This scheme is also similar in function to A-F grading, in that it descriptively assigns some categorical value to schools. Various priorities are weighted and calculated. As shown in Figure 9, schools are assigned a categorical rating. Comparisons between schools (differentiation) are facilitated due to the category each school is given.

Figure 10

Illinois Categorical Rating Report Card



Note. (Illinois State Board of Education, 2019).

Based on the school grading criteria established for Illinois, Nauvoo Elementary School, the school portrayed in Figure 9, was determined to be a commendable school. More detailed information, including mobility rates, growth scores, school finances, attendance, and teacher retention is readily available on the school report card web page (Illinois State Board of Education, 2019). Each state includes various additional information that may or may not be weighted on a school's given grade.

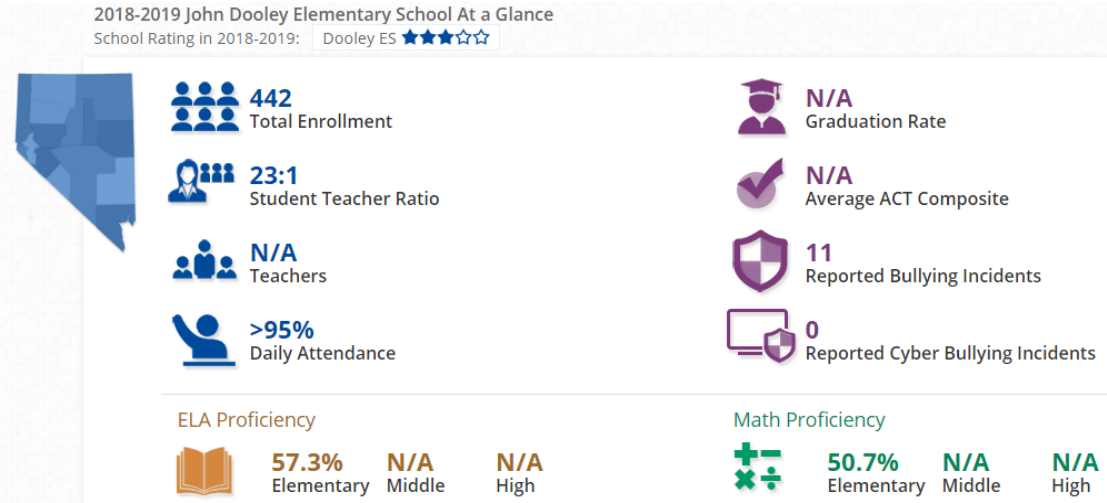
Figure 7 also portrays the change from five states implementing the numerical rating scheme during the pre-ESSA period to 16 states during the current ESSA period. The number of states implementing the categorical rating scheme increased by 11, showing the greatest increase of all the school grading schemes.

Star System

This report is considered a star system scheme since after weighing the school grading criteria determined by the state, school receive a corresponding number of stars. As an example, John Dooley Elementary school was given three stars by the state of Nevada, as shown in Figure 10.

Figure 11

Nevada Star Rating Report Card



Note. (Nevada Department of Education, 2019).

Similar to other states that implement this school grading scheme, various information, such as enrollment, student to teacher ratio, attendance, behavior, academic achievement, financial information, and civil rights information is displayed on this report card, although not all information displayed is weighted into the number of stars awarded (Nevada Department of Education, 2019).

Figure 7 also portrays the change from one state implementing the numerical rating scheme during the pre-ESSA period to five states during the current ESSA period. The number of states implementing the numerical rating scheme increased by four.

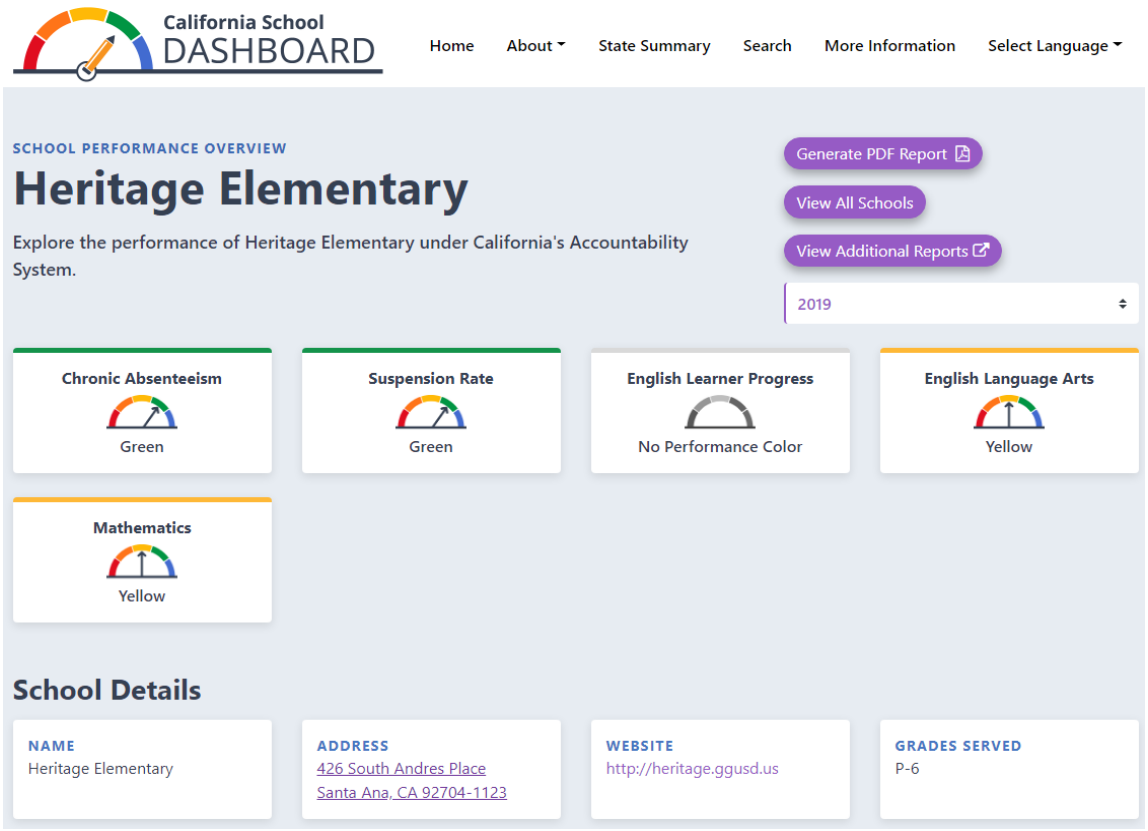
Data Dashboard

The most notable change from the two compared time periods was the decline in the number of states that reported school grading through a data dashboard scheme. In the pre-ESSA period, nearly half (22) states implemented a data dashboard scheme of publicly reporting and grading schools. Current ESSA plans reveal that only six states (California, Idaho, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Dakota, and Pennsylvania) currently report school grading primarily through the data dashboard scheme.

One of the challenges of reporting school grading through data dashboards is that it is relatively difficult to compare or differentiate between schools. While an option to view various schools may be included, many data dashboards, such as California's example in Figure 11, simply conveys statistical data that does not facilitate a clear analysis to grade or differentiate between schools. As such, differentiation is possible, but requires substantially more effort on the part of the researcher.

Figure 12

California Data Dashboard Rating Report Card



Note. (California Department of Education, 2019).

Overall Summary of School Grading Methods

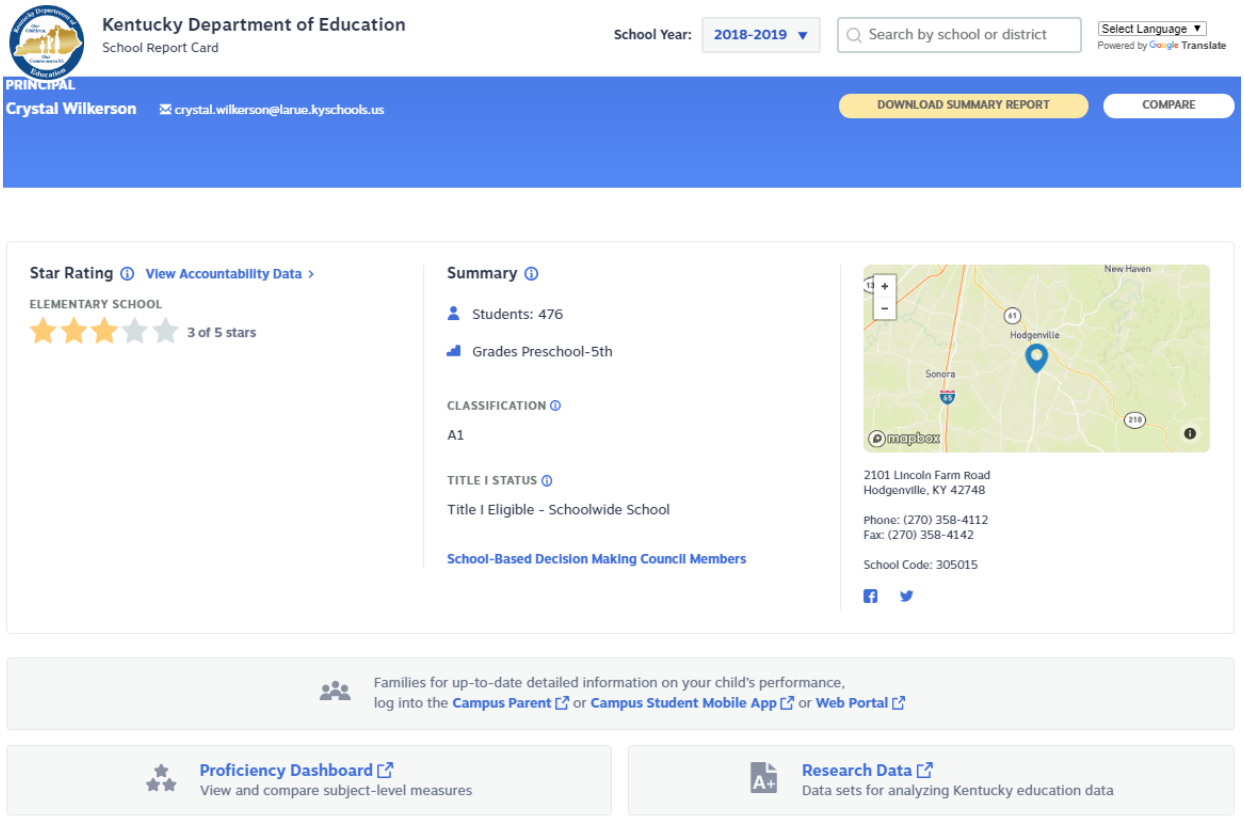
While states clearly prefer to report with one school grading scheme, most report additional data, as mentioned previously, in conjunction with their preferred scheme. The data in Figure 7 represents the primary scheme each state chose to implement.

Kentucky is an example of one state that implements a type of hybrid reporting method (see Figure 12). Kentucky's school grade reporting has evolved to primarily represent a star system scheme, but upon closer examination of their school report card, one can access data though a variety of means that is resemblant of data dashboards. Kentucky has also facilitated

school differentiation by including a simple link in the upper corner of their school report card for comparing schools.

Figure 13

Kentucky Star System and Other Methods Report Card



Note. (Kentucky Department of Education, 2019).

Due to the format of ESSA, states are allowed greater liberty in determining their scheme of school grading and in deciding on many of the indicators to determine those grades, as well as the weight ascribed to each indicator. Variation is evident among the states in all those areas. Variation even exists between those states that have chosen similar schemes for reporting school grades. Furthermore, variation with the complexity or simplicity of intuitively accessing and interpreting information is evident. While each state appears to emphasize one scheme of school

grade reporting, additional data can be found on each state's website, often included with the published school grade reports.

Indicator Domain

Data from the pre-ESSA and current ESSA periods for all 50 states are presented in Appendix 4*, Compiled Pre-ESSA and Current ESSA Indicators*. Each state is represented on two rows. The row with the state name (highlighted in light beige) represents data (school grading schemes and indicators) derived from current ESSA plans. The row below the state name (highlighted in light blue) represents similar data derived from post NCLB, but prior to current ESSA plans. At the end of each row, the total number of indicators for each state is tallied, with the change in the number of indicators portrayed in the final column.

Nine states (Alabama, Alaska, California, Delaware, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, and West Virginia) decreased the number of indicators in their state assessment systems over these two time periods. Thirty-four states increased in the number of indicators implemented. Among the 50 states and the District of Columbia, there was a net increase of 72 indicators. This equates to an average increase of 1.41 indicators for each state.

Indicators selected by the various states clearly fit into five categories: Early Warning (attendance or chronic absenteeism), Well-Rounded Education (inclusion of fine or performing arts, physical education, world languages, computer science, health, library, science, and social studies), Culture and Climate (school environment/climate, behavior or suspensions, class size, teacher quality, early intervention programs, and social-emotional learning), Other Assessments (gifted and talented programs, minimally proficient, students with disabilities, military or workforce readiness, transition or high school readiness, and test participation rates), and Locally

Determined (these indicators may fit into one of the first four indicator categories, but since they are "locally determined," they are designated to this unique indicator classification).

Early Warning Category

Attendance and Chronic Absences were the only indicators identified that belonged in this category. While this was a popular indicator during the pre-ESSA period with 28 states requiring evaluation, it proved to be even more popular with 15 additional states (Arizona, Connecticut, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington) adopting this as a required, but state chosen, fifth indicator during the current ESSA period, as portrayed in Figure 14. A closer look at Appendix 4, Compiled Pre-ESSA and Current ESSA Indicators, shows that with the exception of the required test participation indicator that is included and tallied, for nine states (Alabama, Alaska, Hawai'i, Indiana, Maine, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, Oregon) this is the only chosen fifth indicator.

Figure 14

Early Warning Category

Early Warning Category

Indicator	Pre-ESSA	Current ESSA	Change
Attendance & Chronic Absences	28	38	+10

The 10 states that do not include attendance and chronic absences indicators in the current ESSA period with given weight to school grades are Florida, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Vermont,

and Wyoming. Of those10states, five states that implemented attendance and chronic absences as an indicator to determine school grading during the pre-ESSA period have discontinued it during the current ESSA period: Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Vermont.

Well-Rounded Education Category

Nine components or factors are included in this category: science, social studies, fine art, computer science, physical education, world language, performing art, health, and library as portrayed in Figure 15 and Figure 16. Four of the nine identified indicators in this category (computer science, physical education, health, and library) were not implemented by any state as indicators for school grading during the pre-ESSA time period, but a few states adopted them during the current ESSA period. These indicators are computer science, adopted by Arkansas and Maryland; physical education, adopted by Connecticut, Georgia, Maryland, Michigan, and Vermont; health, adopted by Georgia, Kentucky, and Maryland; and library, adopted by Michigan. Utah implemented a science indicator in the Well-Rounded Education Category in the pre-ESSA and current ESSA periods.

While this category saw an increase of 12 in the total number of indicators implemented, from 48 to 60, there was a net decrease in the number of states that implemented at least one indicator from this category.

Figure 15

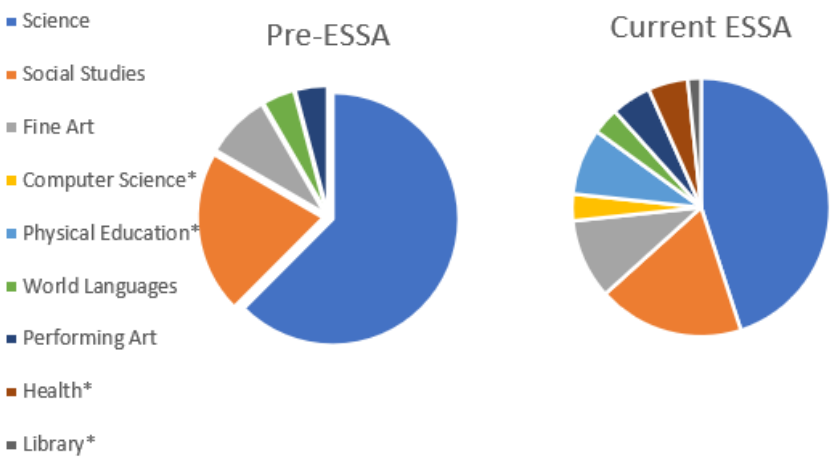
Well-Rounded Education Category

Well-Rounded Education Category			
Indicator	**Pre-ESSA**	**Current ESSA**	**Change**
Science	30	27	-3
Social Studies	10	11	+1
Fine Art	4	6	+2
Computer Science*	0	2	+2
Physical Education*	0	5	+5
World Languages	2	2	0
Performing Art	2	3	+1
Health*	0	3	+3
Library*	0	1	+1
Total Well-Rounded Education indicators	**48**	**60**	**+12**

*Computer Science, Physical Education, Health, and Library indicators were not implemented by states on pre-ESSA measures.

Figure 16

Well-Rounded Education Category: Comparison of Two Time Periods



During the pre-ESSA period, 31 states required Well-Rounded Education Category indicators. During the current ESSA period the number dropped to 28 states. States that implemented a required indicator in this category during the pre-ESSA period, but not during the current ESSA period were Hawai'i, Idaho, Kansas, Maine, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oregon, Virginia, Washington. States that were not requiring indicators in this category during the pre-ESSA period and began implementing them during the current ESSA period were Colorado, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

Two states (Kentucky and South Carolina) required world languages as an indicator during the pre-ESSA period. Kentucky kept it for both periods, while South Carolina discontinued it and Georgia added it during the current ESSA period. Surprisingly, as much as there appears to be an overall common technology push in education today, only two states, Arkansas, and Maryland, added computer science as a required indicator.

By far the most common indicator in the Well-Rounded Education category is science, with 27 states requiring it as an indicator in the current ESSA period, albeit a decline from 30 states requiring it in the pre-ESSA period. Overall, states are cumulatively adopting 12 more indicators in the Well-Rounded Education category during the current ESSA period as compared to the pre-ESSA period.

Culture and Climate Category

During the pre-ESSA period, 16 states implemented indicators from this category. This increased to 22 states, a net increase of six, during the current ESSA period. States that were implementing indicators from this category during the pre-ESSA period and then stopped during the current ESSA period were Alaska, Delaware, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North

Carolina, South Dakota. States that were not implementing any indicators from this category during the pre-ESSA period, but began implementing indicators from this category during the current ESSA period were Arkansas, Idaho, Kentucky, Maryland, Nebraska, Nevada, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming, and Washington D.C. Utah did not implement a required indicator in this category during neither the pre-ESSA or the current ESSA period.

The six indicators include school environment/climate, behavior or suspensions, class size, teacher quality, early intervention programs, and social-emotional learning and are portrayed in Figure 17 and Figure 18. The overall number of indicators increased from 28 during the pre-ESSA period to 32 indicators during the current ESSA period. The only indicator with an increase in the Culture and Climate Category came from the school quality survey/review indicator, which 18 states are currently utilizing -- an increase of 14 states from four states: Delaware, Illinois, New Mexico, and North Dakota. As an example, Arkansas calculates an aggregation of indicators in this category that includes engagement, access, readiness, completion, and success criteria (Key, 2019). Another example would be New York, where that state piloted the U.S. Department of Education school climate surveys to aide in forming a school climate improvement team (New York State Education Department, 2018). It is noteworthy that all other indicators in the Culture and Climate Category experienced a decrease from the pre-ESSA period to the current ESSA period.

The Behavior or Suspension indicator had a decrease of just one state. Rhode Island declared, “The Student Suspension Indicator will measure the number of out of school suspensions per 100 students pre-kindergarten through grade 12. The rate is calculated by dividing the total number of suspensions by the total number of students enrolled and

multiplying this by 100. Students who are suspended have lower student achievement and are more likely to be retained and drop out of school" (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2018, p. 32).

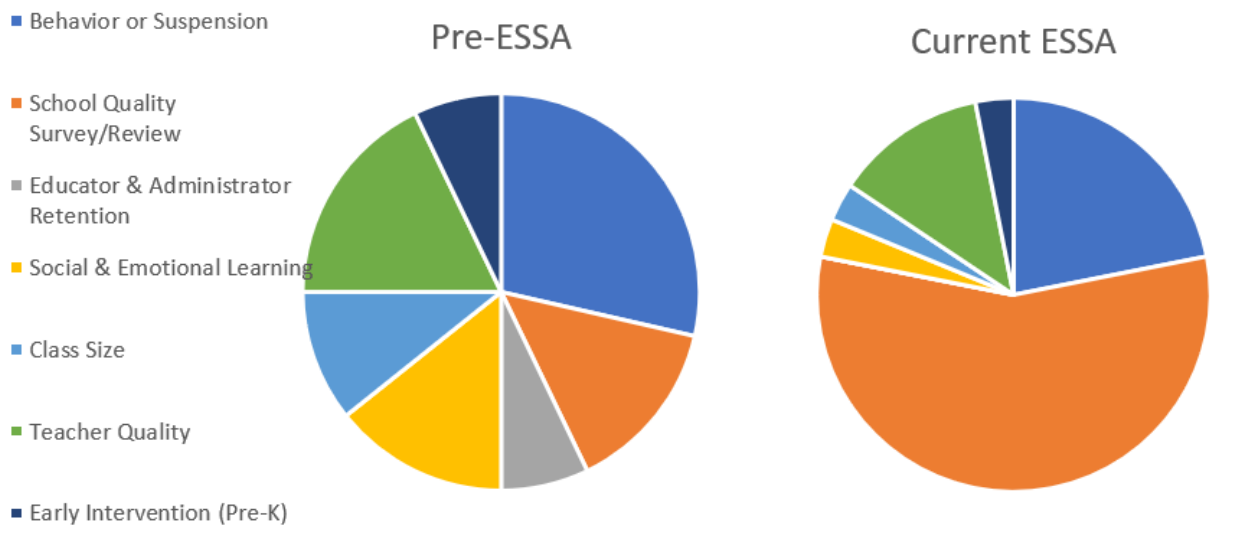
Figure 17

Culture and Climate Category

Culture and Climate Category			
Indicator	**Pre-ESSA**	**Current ESSA**	**Change**
Behavior or Suspension	8	7	-1
School Quality Survey/Review	4	18	+14
Educator & Administrator Retention	2	0	-2
Social & Emotional Learning	4	1	-3
Class Size	3	1	-2
Teacher Quality	5	4	-1
Early Intervention (Pre-K)	2	1	-1
Total Culture and Climate indicators	**28**	**32**	**+4**

Figure 18

Culture and Climate Category: Comparison of Two Time Periods



During the pre-ESSA period, only two states, Delaware and Maine, focused on Educator and Administrator Retention (keeping teachers and principals employed from year to year) as part of the formal school grading system with weight ascribed to the grade a school receives. Under the current ESSA period, no states are using this indicator as part of their ESSA plan.

During the pre-ESSA time period, four states, Delaware, Iowa, South Carolina, and West Virginia embraced social and emotional learning (SEL) in their school grading system. As one example, West Virginia "prepared strategic plans to sustain school climate efforts; the plans included ways to integrate social and emotional learning with academics" (Chapman, 2018, p. 12). A current societal focus to support social and emotional learning in the schools is apparent. One organization surveyed 884 Pre-K to grade 12 public school principals and others and found that support for SEL is high, with 73% of schools implementing SEL either school-wide or partially (DePaoli, 2017). With this perceived support, one might expect an increased focus on this area by having it included as a required indicator on school report cards. Surprisingly, only Iowa currently requires an indicator in this area. Iowa analyzes "three domains of conditions for learning: safety, engagement, and environment" (Gayl, 2017, p. 7). Delaware, South Carolina, and West Virginia, states that required this indicator during the pre-ESSA period, no longer include it and no other state has included it as part of their current ESSA plan.

The Class Size indicator refers to the number of students per teacher. This indicator was included in school report cards previously by Delaware, New Hampshire, and New Jersey. Only Washington D.C. includes it as a required indicator in the current ESSA period.

Teacher Quality is another indicator in the Culture and Climate Category. Teacher Quality includes levels of educational attainment by educators and teacher satisfaction surveys. As portrayed in Figure 17, a decline was evidenced in the number of states that adopted this

indicator. Only four states (Montana, Nebraska, Vermont, and Washington D.C.) currently require this as an indicator. During the pre-ESSA period, five states (Delaware, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, and South Dakota) required this indicator. While this shows an overall reduction of only one state implementing this indicator, all five of the states that implemented this indicator during the pre-ESSA period abandoned it during the current ESSA period. All four states that are currently implementing the Teacher Quality indicator were not implementing it as a required component of their school report card prior to the current ESSA period.

High-quality and intensive Early Intervention (pre-K) can yield significant improvements in cognitive, academic, and social outcomes (Ramey & Ramey, 1998). With the emphasis about the importance of early intervention (pre-K), two states required this indicator during the pre-ESSA period, Alaska, and California. Both Alaska and California have dropped early intervention from their school grading requirements and Illinois began to implement it as part of their current ESSA plan. Illinois is the only state currently applying this indicator.

Other Assessments Category

The six indicators include gifted and talented programs, minimally proficient, students with disabilities, military or workforce readiness, transition or high school readiness, and test participation rates and are reflected in Figure 19 and Figure 20. Utah did not implement an indicator in this category during the pre-ESSA period, but did implement two indicators (test participation and minimally proficient) in this category during the current ESSA period.

This indicator category represents the area of greatest overall focus as well as greatest increase of implementation by the states. This is in great part due to the minimum 95 percent participation rate requirement labeled as "Test Participation Indicator," which only five states (Mississippi, Montana, New Mexico, Wisconsin, and Washington D.C.) were previously

implementing as a required indicator that had weight for school grading during the pre-ESSA period. NCLB also required a 95 percent participation rate on statewide assessments to make AYP, but participation was not necessarily included by the states as part of a school's overall grade (Caffrey, 2010).

A test participation indicator is a required component of ESSA and is factored in school grading, although it was arguable if California, Virginia, and Washington D.C. were fully complying with this requirement at the beginning of the current ESSA period. At the beginning of the current ESSA period California simply reported a test participation rate with an icon on its dashboard with no weight factored into the school letter grade (Fensterwald, 2017). With the implementation of California's 2020 dashboard, California will add a factored weight for schools that do not meet the 95% participation requirement (Thurmond, 2019). Washington D.C. and Virginia's plans to address test participation were vague and indefinite (Klein, 2017). They currently look to be modifying their ESSA plans to comply with ESSA's test participation requirement (District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2020; West Virginia Department of Education, 2019). Since these changes happened after the start of the current ESSA period, these states, California, Virginia, and Washington D.C., are not considered as applying and requiring the test participation indicator in the current ESSA period data. Current ESSA period data does not include anticipated or planned modifications to state ESSA plans.

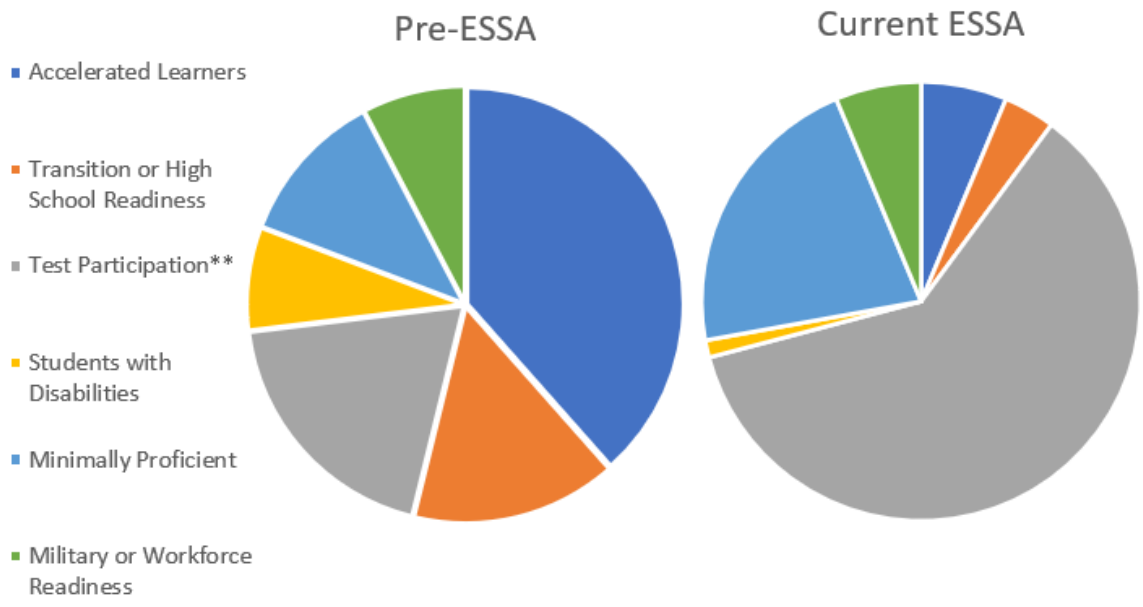
Figure 19

Other Assessments Category

Other Assessments Category			
Indicator	Pre-ESSA	Current ESSA	Change
Accelerated Learners	10	5	-5
Transition or High School Readines	4	3	-1
Test Participation**	5	48	+43
Students with Disabilities	2	1	-1
Minimally Proficient	3	17	+14
Military or Workforce Readiness	2	5	+3
Total Well-Rounded Education indicators	26	79	+53

Figure 20

Other Assessments Category: Comparison of Two Time Periods



If the required Test Participation indicator were not included for both time periods, this entire Other Assessments Category would have only increased by 10 indicators nationally instead of the reported increase of 53. Without the increase of 43 states including the required

Test Participation indicator the reported increase of implemented indicators would be reduced. This would have resulted in an overall indicator increase of only 29 indicators nation-wide between these two time periods

Locally Determined Category

This is the fifth indicator area and is the most unique because it provides the greatest autonomy to schools. ESSA allows individuals schools to determine their own indicator(s), academic and/or non-academic, that factors into the grade a school receives, and this is what is referred to in this study as Locally Determined Indicators.

During the Pre-ESSA period, six states (Alabama, Connecticut, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, and Nevada) applied some version of either Locally Determined Academic or Non-Academic indicators. Since the implementation of ESSA, even these states retreated from this approach. Currently no states require Locally Determined Indicators (see Figure 21) that bear weight on the final grade a school receives. Utah did not implement an indicator in this category during either the pre-ESSA or current ESSA period.

Figure 21

Locally Determined Category

Locally Determined Indicators Category			
Indicator	**Pre-ESSA**	**Current ESSA**	**Change**
Academic	**4**	**0**	**-4**
Non-Academic	**3**	**0**	**-3**
Total Locally Determined indicators	**7**	**0**	**-7**

Summary of Indicator Categories

Without the Test Participation indicator included, the indicators with the greatest increase between the two time periods would be students identified as being Minimally Proficient, and School Quality Survey/Review – an increase of 14 for each indicator. Surprisingly, while there were minor indicator declines in Transition or High School Readiness and Students with Disabilities, the indicator for Accelerated Learners reduced by half, bringing the total number of states applying this indicator to only five (Arizona, Florida, Kentucky, Nevada, and Ohio).

Summary of Optional, Locally Selected Indicators

An overall look at the data that compares the pre-ESSA and current ESSA time periods shows an overall increase in not only the number of indicators being implemented across the nation, but an increase as well in the number of categories being represented by the indicator categories: Early Warning, Well-Rounded Education, Culture and Climate, Other Assessments, and Locally Determined. Figure 22 represents the number of states that have implemented at least one indicator in the indicator categories. Indicators categories that showed an increase in the number of states implementing at least one indicator during the two time periods were Early Warning (+10), Culture and Climate (+6), and Other Assessments (+27). Two indicator categories showed a slight decrease of state implementation during the two time periods were Well-Rounded Education (-3) and Locally Determined (-5). An approach that is considered more holistic promotes a well-rounded education by implementing a larger number of indicators.

Figure 22

States Implementing Indicators Within Indicator Categories

Indicator Categories

	Early Warning Category	Well-Rounded Education Category	Culture and Climate Category	Other Assessments Category	Locally Determined Category
Pre-ESSA	28	31	16	21	5
Current ESSA	38	28	22	48	0
Change:	+10	-3	+6	+27	-5

Remarkable variation in the approach of states towards a more holistic approach to school grading was evident from the research data. While there is no limit to the number of indicators states can adopt in the current ESSA plans, and while not embracing the potential of holistic school grading that ESSA allows by permitting states to choose and increase the number of indicators they implement, 34 states have made a shift in moving that direction by adopting more optional indicators during the current ESSA period as compared to the pre-ESSA period. Thirteen states (Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island) have adopted three or more additional optional indicators in their current ESSA plans as compared with their pre-ESSA plans. Eight states (Hawai'i, Idaho, Indiana, Maine, Minnesota, New Mexico, Oregon, and Virginia) showed no change at all in the number of additional optional indicators implemented.

While the average increase of indicators implemented by the states is 1.41, a few states stand out and appear to be taking strides towards providing a more holistic approach to school

grading. The two states that stand out the most as having the greatest increase of optional, state-selected indicators, an increase of eight each, are Kentucky and Maryland. Maryland went from having one indicator during the pre-ESSA period to having nine. Kentucky, however, is the state that is applying the most indicators overall. They are applying 13 indicators (Early Warning: Attendance and Chronic Absences; Well-Rounded: Science, Social Studies, Fine Art, World Language, Performing Art, Health; Culture and Climate: Behavior or Suspension, School Quality Survey/Review; Other Assessments: Accelerated Learners, Transition or High School Readiness, Test Participation, Minimally Proficient) which were represented in each of the five categories, minus locally determined indicators. Kentucky is currently the state that is providing the most holistic approach to school grading in the nation.

By contrast, nine states (Alabama, Alaska, California, Delaware, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, and West Virginia) reduced the total number of state-selected indicators they require of schools to implement during the current ESSA period as compared to the pre-ESSA period. The state that had the greatest reduction of indicators is Delaware. However, even with a reduction from 10 to five optional indicators, Delaware is still implementing five indicators, which is more than the number most other states are implementing.

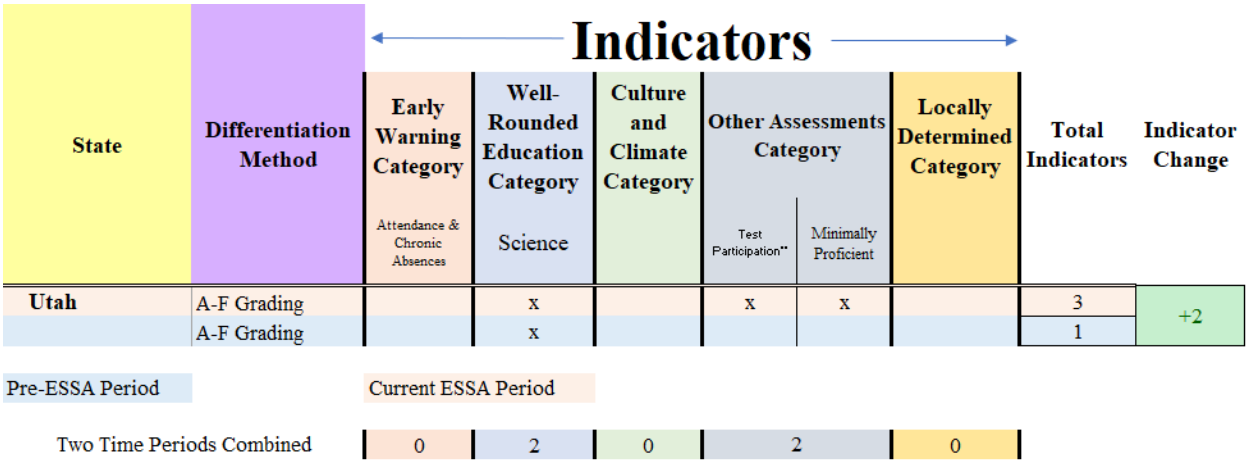
Fourteen states appear to be doing the minimum required by ESSA: Alabama, Alaska, California, Hawai'i, Indiana, Kansas, Maine, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, and Virginia. They are each identified as implementing only two additional optional indicators, which is the lowest number of optional indicators being implemented by any of the states. Two supportive charts are not displayed in this section but are displayed in the appendices and are referred to as Appendix D, Pre-ESSA Period Summary of Indicators and Appendix E, Current-ESSA Period Summary of Indicators.

A Closer Look at Utah

Like all other states, Utah requires assessments in language arts and math for elementary and middle schools. As language arts and math assessment is required by ESSA, these indicators are intended to be used to formulate a letter grade for each school and given school grading weight as determined by the Utah Legislature and the Utah State Board of Education. As optional indicators, Utah also chooses to allocate school grading weight to test participation, science assessment, and growth of minimally proficient students in language arts, math, and science (see Figure 23). Of course, reporting on test participation is required by ESSA and is a factor for determining a school's letter grade, although Utah state law permits parents to opt their children out of end-of-level assessments if they choose. Utah calculated science scores in determining school grading prior to the current ESSA period and like before, Utah continues to assess in science, reporting on both proficiency and growth. Utah also heavily weighs growth of students who have been identified as being minimally proficient, and this has significant weight on the letter grade a school receives. These assessments of minimally proficient students portray proficiency and growth (Utah State Board of Education, 2019c). Other than a few modifications to Utah's existing school grading plan, nothing has significantly changed or been newly implemented since the pre-ESSA period. Utah is not requiring any indicators in the early warning or culture and climate categories. Utah is not taking significant advantage of the allowance provided to states under the guidelines of ESSA.

Figure 23

Summary of Utah's Optional Indicators



State	Differentiation Method	Indicators: Early Warning Category (Attendance & Chronic Absences)	Indicators: Well-Rounded Education Category (Science)	Indicators: Culture and Climate Category	Indicators: Other Assessments Category (Test Participation**)	Indicators: Other Assessments Category (Minimally Proficient)	Indicators: Locally Determined Category	Total Indicators	Indicator Change
Utah	A-F Grading		x		x	x		3	+2
	A-F Grading		x					1	
Pre-ESSA Period		Current ESSA Period							
Two Time Periods Combined		0	2	0	2		0		

**Test Participation is a required ESSA measure of school performance in ESSA, but was not required during the pre-ESSA period.

As with other states, it is important to note that grades K-2 proficiency and progress scores are not factored into the grade a school receives. This accounts for nearly half of all elementary school students not being included, as testing results are included only for grades three and up.

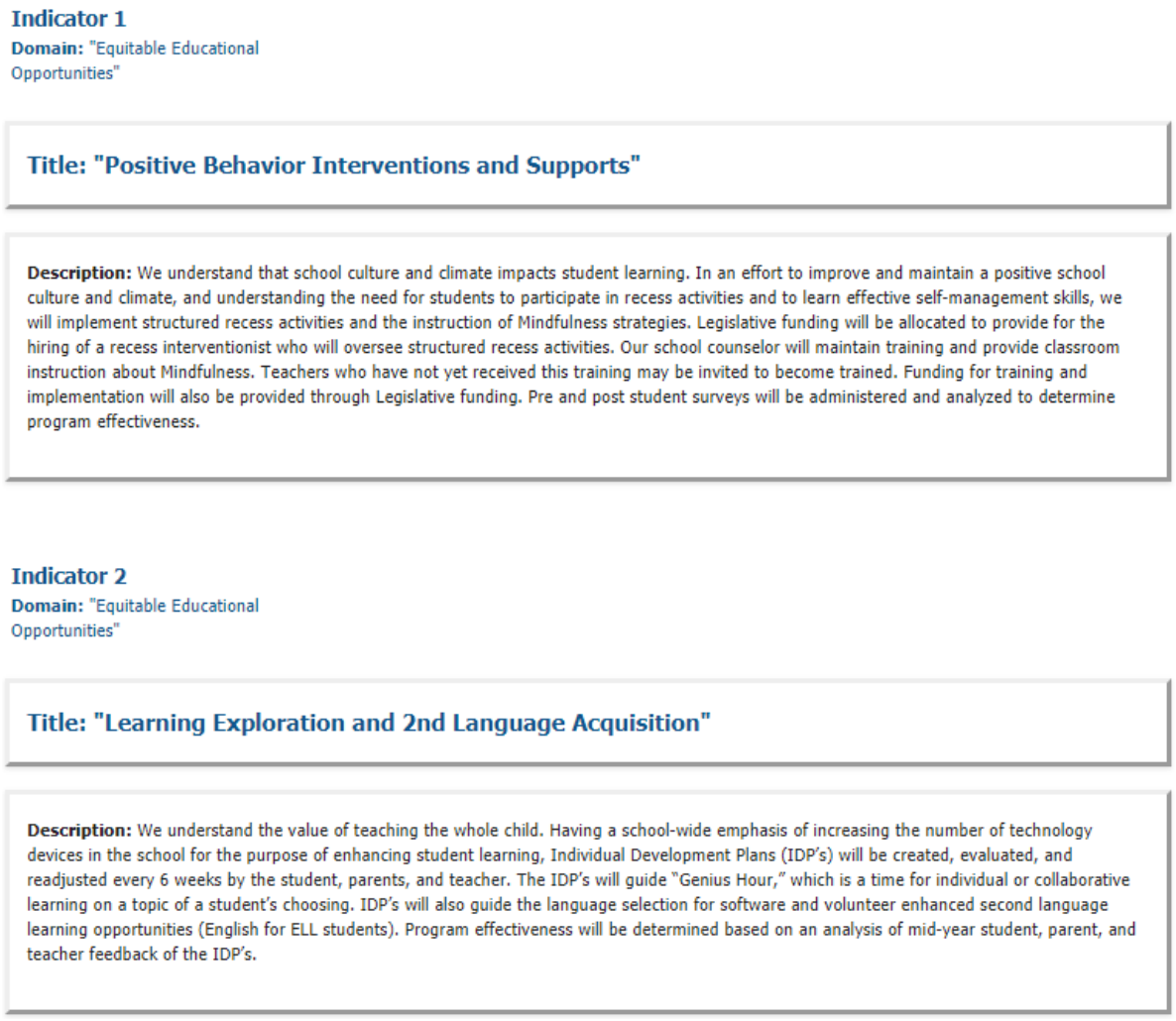
With the addition of including indicators for test participation and minimally proficient students used in determining school grades, Utah has increased the number of optional by two indicators, from having one during the pre-ESSA period to three during the current ESSA period. This indicator increase of two is slightly greater than the national average increase of 1.41. Utah is among 23 states that increased by two or more optional indicators from these the two compared time periods.

An interesting item to note about Utah is that although it is not required, schools are now allowed to decide their own Locally Determined Indicators, referred to in Utah as Self-Reported Measures, see Figure 16. Individual schools may autonomously identify up to two indicators that appear on the school report card. While these indicators are posted, the results of these indicators

are not included on the school report card and they do not contribute in weight to the grade schools receive.

Figure 24

Example of Utah's Self-Reported Indicators.



Note. Example take from Columbia Elementary (Utah State Board of Education, 2020a).

Other than the indicators required by ESSA, one might assume there would be significant uniformity in state ESSA plans from the states. The data presented in this section conveys differences among the states in the number of indicators required in state ESSA plans. Data also shows evidence of disparity in the types of indicators required in various categories. States place

different emphasis on both the number and variety of indicators required. These findings support the claim that ESSA loosens the federal hold on education and gives more authority back to the states. However, many states, including Utah, are not taking full advantage of the latitude that ESSA allows. As a result, states may not be providing a holistic approach to school grading.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The overall purpose of this study was to consider the letter grades that Utah K-8 schools received on school report cards under the guidelines of ESSA and to determine, in comparison with other states, if the letter grades issued reflects a holistic measure of school performance. The findings were a result of an intensive comparative research of school grading systems, school report card methods, and an analysis of school report card indicators required by all 50 states during the pre-ESSA period with the current ESSA Period. Four research questions guided the research. The research provides evidence of an overall national movement towards more holistic approaches to school grading, but not substantially. Utah's movement was found to be similar to the national trend.

Discussion of Research Questions

Question 1

What are the state school grading systems and indicators that were in use just prior to ESSA, as well as those that are currently in place through ESSA, by all 50 states plus Washington, D.C.?

The results of this study show evidence of shifts in the differentiation or school grading implemented by many of the states. This is likely a result of the federal requirement of formulating a school grade to differentiate between schools within each state and of the requirement to implement at least one additional indicator of each state's choosing.

School grading systems implemented by the states were categorized in five different methods or approaches: A-F Grading, Numerical Rating, Categorical Rating, Star System, and Data Dashboard. A shift in the type of school grading methods was evidenced from pre-ESSA to

the current ESSA period as portrayed in Figure 7, *School Grading Systems*. During the Pre-ESSA period, more states implemented a Data Dashboard method than any other method. The Categorical Rating method was most common during the current ESSA period.

During the pre-ESSA period, 22 states (43%) utilized a data dashboard to report school accountability. Since data dashboards primarily portray results in a variety of areas at a glance, it is more challenging to differentiate between schools with this form of reporting as compared with the other forms. There was a shift from 22 to now only six states (12%) currently using this form of school grading under ESSA.

Fourteen states (27%), including Utah, require issuing school letter grades. This is likely due to the familiarity of A-F grading that essentially every adult in our society experienced as a student. Unexpectedly, this method of school grading is in decline. Three fewer states are implementing this system of reporting during the current ESSA period as compared to before, during the pre-ESSA period. While one might reason this would be an increasingly popular choice for school grading because of its general familiarity, there are arguable reasons why this method of school grading is in decline.

One possible reason why A-F school grading is in decline may be due to a paradigm shift that is happening in education about how schools are grading students. Many school systems are moving from grading students in the more traditional and familiar A-F grading system format to a standards-based system. State school board members and educators are understanding that the traditional A-F grading system is subjective and inconsistently implemented. A standards-based system provides information that promotes clear and consistent reporting by articulating mastery levels of specific learning standards, rather than averaging multiple indicators (i.e. test results, homework completion, participation, attendance) and subjectively determining a letter grade that

implies concept mastery. The A-F grading system often promotes inaccuracies and inconsistencies when reporting on various levels of proficiency because educators typically set their own standards and proficiency levels. The standards-based approach of assessing students is increasing in popularity because educators are realizing it provides a comparatively more authentic measurement of proficiency due to standardized common assessments and reporting. Many state policy makers understand the wisdom to move this direction for state-driven school grading as well.

Other school grading methods, such as Numerical Rating, Categorical Rating, and Star System, are very similar to A-F grading. They are similar in that the states choose how much priority or weight to allocate to both the required indicators within a school grading approach as well as their chosen indicators. States come up with their formula for arriving at an overall school score. Then they assign a label or symbol to represent how well individual schools are performing overall. If A-F school grading were combined with these three methods and they were grouped as one category, they would overwhelmingly be considered the most common method implemented by the states, with 45 of the 50 states and Washington D.C. (88%) utilizing one of these methods for school grading or differentiation.

A dispute could be in the making because data dashboards do not generally facilitate a school grading method of differentiating (comparing) between schools, which is a requirement of ESSA. One of three scenarios will happen because of the requirement to differentiate between schools: The U.S. Department of Education will either overlook and choose to not enforce school differentiation, the requirement to differentiate will be modified or eliminated, or schools will be held to the current law and required to develop some form of meaningful differentiation. Many states implement a data dashboard as a hybrid system that includes some form of grade or label

to facilitate school differentiation. This seems to be an increasingly common approach to reporting school grading.

It would be well for each state to adopt an approach to school grading that would include a comprehensive data dashboard which provides a coherent holistic representation of school accountability, ideally representing the five indicator categories. If federal policy makers still believe it is necessary to differentiate between schools, states could perform this analysis through a hybrid approach that would include a data dashboard along with another form of ranking schools for comparative purposes.

In support of the spirit of the 10th Amendment, ESSA has redirected many ESEA decisions, such as determining additional indicators and choosing the method of school grading, to individual states. The shift in the school grading systems that were implemented by the states from the pre-ESSA period to the current ESSA period was likely a result of the ESSA requirement to differentiate between schools using a publicly issued school report card. Although data dashboards may be considered easier to navigate, more user friendly in comparison to other methods of differentiation and may contain reporting data on a variety of indicators, they are not as helpful in comparing schools as the other four systems. The other four systems have easily compared titles or symbols, where data dashboards primarily present data about individual schools that is sometimes compared with district or state averages, but not easily or often compared with other schools.

Question 2

Does a comparison of the optional indicators found in each state's plan during these two time periods reflect a trend towards holistic approaches to school grading?

An approach that is considered more holistic promotes a well-rounded education by implementing a larger number of indicators included in a variety of five indicator categories (see Figure 22): Early Warning, Well-Rounded Education, Culture and Climate, Other Assessments, and Locally Determined. The results showed an overall increase from the pre-ESSA period to the current ESSA period in the number of indicators required by the states. While the results may indicate 28 states have moved towards a more holistic approach to school grading, seven states (Alabama, Alaska, California, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, and South Carolina) created state ESSA plans that were less holistic than during the pre-ESSA period.

In following ESSA guidelines, school grades are comprised of a few indicators that are required of by every state and of at least one other indicator, but potentially many indicators that individual states decide to require of their schools. Math and language arts proficiency indicators were excluded from this study because they were required of every state by ESSA. Thus, this study focused on the 25 optional state-chosen indicators that were identified. These 25 indicators were sorted into five categories: Early Warning (attendance or chronic absenteeism), Well-Rounded Education (fine arts, performing arts, physical education, world languages, computer science, health, library, science, and social studies), Culture and Climate (school environment/climate, behavior or suspensions, class size, teacher quality, early intervention programs, and social-emotional learning), Other Assessments (gifted and talented programs, minimally proficient, students with disabilities, military or workforce readiness, transition or high school readiness, and test participation rates), and Locally Determined (these indicators may fit into one of the first four indicator categories, but since they are "locally determined," they were designated to this unique indicator classification).

The findings suggest that while ESSA policy has generally promoted an increased emphasis on a holistic approach to school grading, schools are not fully embracing the allowance afforded by ESSA of either increasing the number of indicators or broadening the scope of the indicators implemented through representation of the five indicator categories. As was pointed out in the review of the literature, Dr. Helen Ladd, Dr. Henry Levin, Joshua P. Starr, Dr. Craig Hochbein, Betsy DeVos, and many other educational scholars advocate a more holistic approach of school grading because it will result in having a broader overall influence on the quality of education in schools (Hochbein, 2013; Ladd, 2007; Levin, 2012; Phenicie, 2018; Starr, 2017). A more holistic approach to school grading would cause schools to have a well-rounded focus on instruction. Schools tend to focus on what is assessed, sometimes with the price of having less focus on other arguably important indicators.

While the current implementation of ESSA led to an increase of 72 additional indicators being implemented across the nation, 27 states appear to be doing the minimum, or near minimum of what is required. Betsy DeVos, Secretary of Education, recognized this when she addressed a Council of Chief State School Officers: “Even the best plan is short on the meaningful solutions that the law encourages. Even the best plan does not take full advantage of the law’s built-in flexibility” (Phenicie, 2018, p. 1).

There may be various underlying reasons why states are not taking full advantage of ESSA’s built-in flexibility. School policy makers may not have a clear understanding of the long-term benefits of a holistic approach to school grading, or they may feel there are insufficient resources and time available. If policy makers just give this a little deeper thought, they would realize most likely all schools are already providing holistic instruction. Through hybrid data dashboard reporting, many schools are also evaluating and reporting on indicators that are not

formally included in the school report card. They are already measuring and reporting. Policy makers just need to make the decision to include various indicator findings with graded weight on the school report card. The findings from this study clearly show the necessity of holistic instruction and school evaluation.

Apart from Locally Determined Indicators, there was an overall national increase of 35 indicators adopted by states in three of the four other indicator categories: Early Warning Indicators (+10), Culture and Climate (+6), and Other Assessment Measures (+27). There was a slight decrease in the number of indicators adopted by the states in the Well-Rounded Education category (-3). States should not overlook the Locally Determined Indicator category and should embrace empowering schools to determine individual school needs by implementing and reporting of indicators of their own choosing. Locally Determined Indicators should also be given credibility through allocating school grading weight.

As the federal government is making a shift of empowering states in their education plans, states in turn should make a shift of empowering schools by allowing schools to choose indicators and measures that are important, perhaps even unique, to their school community. In addition, it would be well for each state to implement at least one indicator from each of the five indicator categories and to give school grading weight to each indicator. This approach would provide a more credible holistic representation of school quality.

Question 3

What state level school grading system and indicators were and are being implemented by the state of Utah?

In addition to the required indicators, Math and English Language Arts, Utah implemented Science as an optional indicator in the Well-Rounded Education category during

the pre-ESSA period. Utah continued implementing Science as an optional indicator during the current ESSA period, as well as indictors in the Other Assessments category, specifically Test Participation and Minimally Proficient. Thus, Utah's increase of two indicators implemented approximates the national average indicator increase of 1.41.

Historically, Utah has utilized a broad variety of indicators that have been encouraged for accountability measures since the mid-1800s to present (see Appendix A for details). These are grouped below within the five indicator categories:

- Early Warning Indicators: Attendance
- Well-Rounded Education: literacy, reading, writing, spelling, grammar, geography, history, math, physiology, science, geography, nutrition, physical activity, health, foreign languages, civics, economics, technology literacy, computer science, fine and performing arts, and library education.
- Culture and Climate: teaching methods, teacher qualifications, pedagogics, citizenship, personal responsibility, student engagement, suspension rates, classroom organization, emotional support, early childhood education, and school climate.
- Other Assessment Measures: employment, university, and military readiness; racial and economic indicators, community service, accelerated learners, and low performing student growth.
- Locally Determined Indicators: As currently implemented as an optional inclusion on Utah school report cards as Self-Reported Indicators.

As illustrated, the vast number of indicators listed over the last century and a half exhibit the very broad spectrum of accountability indicators that have been measured in Utah schools throughout Utah's history. Utah's current school grading plan requires weighted measurement in

math, language arts, science, test participation, and minimally proficient indicators. It is not recommended or realistic to conduct school grading based on a cumulative total of as many indicators as Utah has seen over her history. Schools indeed measure and report on many more indicators than are required by the Utah State Board of Education, but they do not factor in to the overall school grade that is publicly reported. It is recommended that Utah require at least one indicator in each of the five indicator categories mentioned that bears weight on school report cards.

Question 4

Are Utah elementary and middle schools (K-8) being held accountable for indicators in Utah's state school grading system that represent a holistic approach?

Utah is somewhat of an outlier with school grading and Utah's school grading plan is currently more undecided than in most other states. Utah's ESSA plan makes no mention of letter grades, but rather a 5-point scale which mirrors to a large degree grades or other rating methods (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Even though school A-F grading is not technically written into Utah's ESSA plan, Utah currently has a state law requiring schools to receive an A-F letter grade. Even with this state law, Utah most recently omitted issuing A-F school grades due to complications with the COVID-19 pandemic and previously with testing inconsistencies (Utah State Board of Education, 2020b). Utah only reported state issued school report cards through a data dashboard.

There has been considerable controversy in Utah about requiring state-issued school letter grades (Cortez, 2018; Wood, 2020). It is likely that in the coming years Utah will pass a law to discontinue A-F school grading and to use a data dashboard or hybrid data dashboard for public reporting. In the 2017 Utah legislative session, Sen. Ann Millner, R-Ogden,

unsuccessfully sponsored SB0220 which would have allowed the state board to forgo letter grades. More recently, Rep. Marie Poulson, D-Cottonwood Heights, sponsored legislation in 2020 to remove the A-F letter grade requirement from Utah's accountability system. Rep. Paulson shared, "I definitely think that this dashboard system is a better measure because it looks at all areas. With the testing, there's [sic] only a few subjects that they test and school is much bigger than that" (Cortez, 2018). This year, Rep. Poulson's legislation passed the House 70-0, but it did not pass the Senate (H.B. 175 Education Accountability Amendments, 2020; Tanner, 2020). Even if the Utah state Legislature requires the use of a data dashboard, if some form of school grading is not included, Utah school grading would remain out of compliance with Utah's current ESSA plan because it lacks a method of differentiating or rating between schools.

Utah state law also provides schools the optional opportunity to select other indicators local school communities value. Such indicators are highlighted on participating school report cards but are not factored into accountability system calculations (Title 35E-5-2, 2019). Including this Locally Determined Indicator is a very innovative direction for Utah and aligns with the premise of ESSA by empowering educational accountability at the more local levels. Utah should take this approach one step further and give locally determined indicators weight that impact the overall state issued school grade.

Apart from the items mentioned and the addition of giving some weight to assess the progress of lower achieving students, the school grading method of Utah's current ESSA plan closely resembles Utah's prior plan during the NCLB era and the pre-ESSA period. Not much has changed. Utah is not taking adequate advantage of the flexibility to report on a more-holistic measure of school grading that is allowed and encouraged through ESSA law.

Suggestions for Further Research

1. Continue this study by comparing current ESSA school grading plans and indicators with future school grading plans and indicators. This study would help support understanding whether school grading trends are becoming more holistic.
2. The changes in quantity and variety of indicators should be analyzed. A study should be conducted to evaluate the impact of increasing or decreasing the number of indicators, as well as the variety and representation of indicators in each of the five indicator categories that states require in their grading systems. It should be determined if this increase or decrease impacted holistic approaches school grading.
3. It is recommended that future research determine if states that have a narrower focus on school grading leads teachers to "teach to the test," to focus primarily on those assessed subjects at the expense of other subjects.
4. It would be well to analyze the impact on non-included indicator areas. For example, if a state, such as Utah, focused primarily on math, language arts, and science, would there be a decline in social studies or other academic or non-academic indicator results?

Conclusions

This study will be of special interest to those who implement and influence school policy, such as state legislators and state school board members. This study should have extra interest to Utah school policy makers. As discussed in the review of literature, this study contrasted two approaches to school accountability, a focused narrow approach, and a holistic approach, as influenced by federal oversight of state implementation of ESSA. The focused narrow approach

emphasizes placing school priority on few chosen academic indicators, arguably at the expense of neglecting other academic and non-academic indicators.

There is a lack of overall variation or autonomy in state grading systems. This is seen by some as federal and state policy makers sharing similar perspectives and approaches. While this seems idealistic, it is quite improbable. In reality, states are doing the minimum, or near minimum, required to meet the requirements for receiving federal financial educational support. States are motivated by federal incentives or financial compensation. To empowering and encourage states to take full advantage of the flexibility and opportunity that ESSA allows, federal educational policy makers must explore ways to incentivize states to work towards greater autonomy in holistic school grading approaches.

If seriously considered, the results of this study will have broad influence on the quality of the educational experience of our children and ultimately on the quality and focus of education in schools. The findings, comparisons, and analysis show evidence that the implementation of ESSA had a slight general impact on broadening holistic approaches to school grading, but not a large-scale broad impact with all states, including Utah. We must do better!

Utah's ESSA plan and school grading system, along with the other 49 states and Washington D.C., do not currently reflect an adequate holistic measure of school accountability. Utah is not serving the children as well as could be done because of this narrow approach to school accountability. It is necessary for local districts and individual schools to be empowered by being included in determining the indicators and measures that constitute a state issued school grade. This is imperative for the rest of the nation as well.

Utah has taken a great stance by being the only state in the nation that currently allows schools to determine their own locally determined indicators (Self-Reported Measures). Utah

must be committed to be bolder by making these indicators more meaningful and allocating weight toward the report card grade that schools receive. It is time to value more of what is needed at the local school level -as decided at the local level.

There is an overwhelming desire for excellence by school administration, teachers, parents, and school communities, and schools are motivated toward excellence by the issuance of a school report card. Schools improve in areas that are assessed. As part of state ESSA plans, states need a requirement to implement assessments from all five indicator categories. It is fundamental that those indicators, especially including the locally determined indicator, is given school grading weight.

It would be incumbent upon state legislators and state school board members to consider the findings of this study and of those from other credible educational scholars to form a clear and educationally sound opinion on the purposes and goals of education. These policy makers are obligated to ensure that publicly issued school report cards reflect a sound school grading system that is derived from a simple, yet clear assessment of indicators from the five indicator categories: Early Warning, Well-Rounded Education, Culture and Climate, Other Assessments, and Locally Determined. An approach to school accountability such as this would satisfy the demands to embrace the tenants of the United States Constitution and the implications of Amendments X and XIV would ring true in the hearts and minds of parents and educators alike.

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APPENDIX A

Extended Review of the Literature

Educators have experienced a dramatic evolution over the years with state school accountability systems, one component of which is state school grading systems. Not only are students assessed and graded on their academic proficiency, but schools are graded on their performance as well. Evolution has occurred in federal school accountability systems that has led to changes and variation in state school grading systems. This variation resulted in a continual change in focus for both academic and non-academic indicators used to give school grades as a measure of demonstrating school accountability. School grading systems among the states ranges from narrower evaluation of a few indicators to a more holistic measure that implements several indicators. Holistic approaches to state school grading systems are those that provide a balanced, well-rounded, and more complete approach for teaching and learning.

Amendments X and XIV of the United States Constitution help set the premise for this study (U.S. Const. amend X, XIV). These Amendments have considerable significance in establishing both the authority and focus of our educational system. Amendment X was ratified in 1791 and states, "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people" (U.S. Const. amend. X, p. 1). Amendment X establishes that educational authority belongs to the states and not to the federal government. Amendment XIV was ratified in 1868 and although it does not specifically address education, it had tremendous impact in shaping school accountability measures by ensuring "that states must apply the law equally to all people and cannot discriminate against groups of people" (Boyd, 2014, p. 1).

Perhaps due to the educational disparity and inequality in applying the law among the states, the federal government became increasingly involved in education. Since the beginning of the 20th century, public schools have experienced unprecedented federal legislation with mandated state testing, incentives, and consequences (U.S. National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). With the influence of the Amendment XIV becoming more defined through the national legal system, in 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson made a huge impact on educational equality through his "War on Poverty." A monumental action that proved to have enduring influence on public education was the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Education and Labor. General Subcommittee on Education, 1965).

Reauthorization of the 1965 ESEA Act occurred periodically and the rights guaranteed from Amendment XIV are intertwined in them. The 2001 reauthorization of ESSA, known as The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), expanded the role of the federal government more than any other reauthorization or educational act since ESEA in 1965. The premise of NCLB was to boost student achievement, especially for poor and minority groups. Dissatisfaction increased with NCLB, partly because of the perception that the increased federalization of education was not in harmony with the precepts of Amendment X (Bloomfield, 2003).

Most recently, another reauthorization of President Johnson's 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was initiated by President Barack Obama in 2015, called the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). It is currently being implemented under President Donald Trump's Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos. State plans have been reviewed and approved under her direction.

This bill was the first to lessen the federal government's role in education since the 1980s. Over the years, a myriad of prescriptive and explicit indicators evolved from federal mandates to states and schools. This accountability evolution required annual testing and evaluation of indicators that promoted advances in the performance of various groups of students considered to be the most vulnerable. Standardized testing is still required, but with this bill there is a greater shift of accountability from the federal to the state level. With the understanding that a primary goal of ESSA is to prepare all students for a successful college and career experience, states were required to submit plans for approval to the U.S. Department of Education. These plans include goals, measurements, and indicators, and require that a comparison be made between all schools through publicly reported ratings. Elementary and middle schools in Utah are given letter grades (i.e. A-F; U.S. Department of Education, 2016b, p. 11). Each state implemented their plan beginning in the 2018-2019 school year (Every Student Succeds Act, 2015). The Utah State Board of Education experienced some significant hurdles in seeking federal approval for Utah's ESSA plan. Utah submitted a proposed ESSA plan to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2018 (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Utah's Superintendent of Public Instruction, Sydnee Dickson, received notice on December 14, 2017 that Utah's Plan was not approved because of unclear measures for English-language learners, assessments, and clarity of accountability measurements – which contribute to the distinction of the final grade a school receives. As a result, Utah was requested to resubmit their ESSA plan by December 29, 2017 (Klein, 2017a). Superintendent Dickson requested additional time to complete Utah's ESSA plan (Botel, 2017). A revised plan was submitted on February 14, 2018 (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Utah's ESSA plan was finally approved on July 12, 2018 (Cortez, 2018).

The evolution of the increasingly rigid ESSA initiatives stands in contrast to the flexibility currently granted to states through the ESSA to determine many of their own indicators and measures of school success (Kemp, 2020). Considering this increased flexibility, states were still required to submit their ESSA plans for approval to the US Department of Education and to conform to guidelines that revolves the common indicators of proficiency measurements in English Language Arts, Math, and growth measurements of the lowest performing students. Each state implemented its plan beginning in the 2018-2019 school year (U.S. Congress, 2015).

ESSA allows states to broaden their vision of school accountability by providing a balanced, well-rounded, and more complete approach for teaching and learning. This holistic approach for school accountability may measure a variety of indicators, such as early childhood learning, social and emotional learning, school professional capacity building, arts integration, STEM, and other various indicators (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2017). States are required to choose at least one additional indicator, such as science, attendance, or social studies. Many states only include the minimum or nearly the minimum that ESSA requires. Utah, for instance, requires indicators for science and lower achieving students. These states and Utah are not complying with the law's allowance to include a much broader selection of school accountability indicators (Phenicie, 2018). States are required to choose at least one additional indicator, such as science, attendance, or social studies, as well. Many states only include the minimum or nearly the minimum that ESSA requires. They are not taking full advantage of the law's allowance to include a much broader selection of school accountability indicators (Phenicie, 2018).

Another required component of ESSA is that each state determines a "system of meaningful differentiation," or comparison, between schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2017, p. 11). Utah has implemented A-F school letter grades since 2011 (Utah Board of Education, 2013, p. 1), and Utah has determined to continue issuing schools an A-F letter grade to differentiate between schools (S.B. 271 School Grading Amendments, 2013, p. 6). Proficiency Indicators of English Language Arts, Math, Science, and growth of the lowest performing students are required as part of Utah's system of meaningful differentiation that are key to the determination of the letter grade schools receive on the state issued school report cards. When a school receives a letter grade from the state, it implies that the grade encapsulates all the key elements going on in a school. In actuality, the school grade is a status report on what state legislators feel are key indicators. This may not be an accurate representation of the school as a whole, as the state school grading system may not include all relevant indicators. Utah school policy makers may not be aware of the wide variety of indicators and measures used by other states across the nation or the full potential the new ESSA plan allows. This likely lack of knowledge and narrow vision may result in a less effective state ESSA plan that does not reflect a more balanced measure of school performance, and ultimately would not serve the children as well as could be done.

Across the country, states are implementing a variety of indicators from both current and past school accountability systems. Consideration of those indicators by Utah school policy makers could contribute towards a more holistic approach of measuring school performance. Having familiarity with these additional indicators, Utah school policy makers could empower schools, principals, and school community councils to create measures that not only promote a

more holistic approach of measuring school performance, but also could have components that are tailored to each individual school's focus and needs.

Holistic Education

A holistic approach to education may be synonymous with a well-rounded or complete approach to education. Ameritech College surmises, "A holistic approach means thinking about the big picture" (Jones, 2016, p. 1). All three terms, holistic, well-rounded, and complete, are used interchangeably in various official and unofficial documents describing recommended approaches for state ESSA plans.

The U.S. Department of Education released ESSA regulations to promote well-rounded education with the intent to support states in using allowable flexibility to provide a high-quality, well-rounded education. The Department stated:

> The final regulations will replace the rigid and prescriptive systems that defined No Child Left Behind with new flexibility for state and districts; a more holistic approach to measuring a quality education… The final regulations give states the flexibility to think holistically about how to improve outcomes for all students while helping to ensure access to a well-rounded education. (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a, pp. 1-2)

A major ESSA provision states:

> The final regulations reinforce the statutory requirement that states have robust, multi-indicator statewide accountability systems for all public schools, including all public charter schools, underscoring the flexibility they have to choose new indicators that create a more holistic view of student success. (U.S. Department of Education, 2016c, p. 2)

Laura Jimenez, the director of standards and accountability at the Center for American Progress clarified this approach from ESSA policy when she shared, "Perhaps even more important than students' improved performance on tests, those who receive a well-rounded education are likely better-prepared for college and careers because they develop a wider range of knowledge and skills necessary to succeed" (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2018, p. 5). These statements support the stance that ESSA promotes a holistic approach from the states, whether the terminology used is "holistic," "well-rounded," or "complete."

The National Association of Elementary School Principals posted a publication to encourage and assist principals in their involvement with ESSA while at the same time contributed to the definition of a holistic approach to education. They stated:

> The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) broadly defines a well-rounded and complete education as one that provides students with access to positive, developmentally appropriate learning environments that meets students' learning and related needs, including through services, conditions, and teaching practices around content that is aligned across grade levels, particularly in the early years from prekindergarten to the third grade. (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2017)

Principals are encouraged to "use ESSA implementation to cultivate and support this balanced, holistic vision for teaching and learning" (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2017).

During the official enactment of ESSA, the 114th Congress clearly defined well-rounded education:

> The term `well-rounded education' means courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, geography, computer science, music, career and technical education, health, physical education, and any other subject, as determined by the State or local educational agency, with the purpose of providing all students access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience (U.S. Congress, 2015, p. 305).

As established, the term "holistic" may be considered synonymous with "well-rounded" or "complete," for the purpose of this study, "holistic" is the term most referred to and can be considered synonymous with "well-rounded."

A key consideration is that ESSA is different than its predecessor, NCLB. ESSA does not dictate policy as rigidly as was done through NCLB. States may choose to implement a more holistic approach to school accountability by implementing a well-rounded variety of indicators that contribute to the grade a school receives on annual state issued report cards. For holistic education to occur, states must decide to take advantage of these opportunities allowed by ESSA law.

The Problem and Its Significance

The components of Utah's ESSA plan which determine a school's letter grade do not reflect a holistic measure of school performance. This article addresses that problem. Utah's ESSA plan focuses only on a few indicators selected by state legislators and other policy makers who do not share a comparatively broader vision of holistic school accountability through the implementation of a strategic variety of indicators of school performance.

Prior to the issuance of the current ESSA plans, the U.S. Department of Education permitted states to expand on the requirements of NCLB by indicating that states may develop additional indicators if they choose" (Hickcock, 2002, p. 33). Some states (Alabama, Connecticut, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, and Nevada) were authorized by their individual state policy makers to implement locally determined indicators, or indicators that were decided in the trenches, at the individual school level. This allowed individual school leaders to select indicators they felt were most important for their school's individual success. These locally determined indicators were valued since they had weight on state-issued school grades. Currently, while permitted under ESSA policy, local school districts and schools are not authorized by any state's policy makers to independently decide locally determined indicators that could have weight towards the grade a school receives. The neglect of empowering local schools in this process may lead to a less accurate representation of school success since individual and unique school needs are not addressed. If those who make policies for elementary and middle schools, such as state legislators and state school board members, persist in decisions that overlook a more holistic measure of school performance, the school grading system will continue to reflect a narrow and less accurate view of school accountability. Measured indicators, those that bear weight on the final grade a school receives, receive primary priority and focus which result in less priority being given to many other important aspects of school performance (Hannaway & Hamilton, 2008). ESSA policy requires all states to grade schools. This challenge of addressing a possible reductionistic view of accountability is one that should be considered by policy makers in every state.

Purpose of this Study

This study is a review and critique of the relevant components of Utah's ESSA plan (U.S. Department of Education, 2018) which outlines the formulation of a school's letter grade and determines whether these components are sufficient and reflect a holistic measure of school performance. This study will address four primary research questions:

1. What are the state school grading systems and indicators that were in use just prior to ESSA), as well as those that are currently in place through ESSA, by all 50 states plus Washington, D.C.?
2. Does a comparison of the optional indicators found in each state's plan during these two time periods reflect a trend towards holistic approaches to school grading?
3. What state level school grading system and indicators were and are being implemented by the state of Utah?
4. Are Utah elementary and middle schools (K-8) being held accountable for indicators in Utah's state school grading system that represent a holistic approach?

Value of the Study

Careful consideration of the findings of the four research questions will provide a sound perspective on matters pertaining to school grading. The results of this study will be of value to Utah school policy makers as well as policy makers in other states, and to those who implement and influence school policy because it portrays trend data about optional indicators that contribute to school grades. It will also be of value because it provides comparative data of each state in the nation which may contribute to forming perspectives when considering revising the components of the state grading plans, specifically, the decision to include a holistic representation of school quality indicators and measures. In addition, this study will provide

policy makers with an enlightened perspective of school grading or reporting methods, such as A-F letter grades, data dashboards, numerical rating, etc.

Many issues and historical events, both in the nation and in Utah, influenced the evolution of school accountability which led in part to Utah's school grading system. A general overview of the relevant components of the ESSA is provided. An historical overview of school accountability, standardized testing, school grading, and public educational reporting in the state of Utah is included. Scholarly perspectives about school accountability and reporting systems are also presented.

The Rise of Federal Accountability in Education

As a senator, Robert F. Kennedy said during a 1965 Senate hearing,

> I think it is very difficult for a person who lives in a community to know whether, in fact, his educational system is what it should be, whether if you compare his community to a neighboring community they are doing everything they should be, whether the people that are operating the educational system in a state or local community are as good as they should be.… I wonder if we couldn't have some system of reporting…through some testing system that would be established (by) which the people at the local community would know periodically…what progress had been made. (McKenzie, 2015, p. 2)

What is the best way to teach the children of America? What should be taught to the children of America? How do we know how much a student has learned? The responses to these questions are varied, controversial, and continually developing. As a nation, we often experiment in an effort to answer these questions. The specific skills and measures of competency that are required of students to progress in the school system are called academic standards. Not only have the standards changed over time, but the way they are assessed has evolved as well. The

standards and assessments place responsibility, or accountability, for student learning and achievement on states, school districts, schools, principals, teachers, and students:

> Education reform in the United States since the 1980s has been largely driven by the setting of academic standards for what students should know and be able to do. These standards can then be used to guide all other system components. The SBE (standards-based education) reform movement calls for clear, measurable standards for all school students. Rather than norm-referenced rankings, a standards-based system measures each student against the concrete standard. Curriculum, assessments, and professional development are aligned to the standards. (Glavin, 2014, p. 1)

There has been a dramatic evolution in student assessment over the years in the United States which has contributed to the current state of federal educational accountability and state school accountability systems. Beginning in the 1800s, student assessments, based on quantifiable information, were the primary measures of student academic attainment. Student testing for various purposes, including "identifying students for either factory employment or university academic paths, to assist the United States Army in deciding the military career path of new recruits, or as a means to rank students according to various academic standards," was in use in the United States as early as 1845, and quite likely, much earlier than that (Schaeffer, 2016, pp. 2, 4). This section, however, is not intended to be an in-depth exploration of assessments given to students, but rather, a historical overview showing relevant factors that contributed to current school accountability measures, including the practice of grading schools. The two are correlated. As student assessment has evolved and become increasingly standardized, those measures, used in a cumulative fashion, have evolved to become the key factors in determining school grading.

Evidence of student assessment that led to current educational accountability requirements in the United States may be found prior to 1845, when, in the climate of increasing criticism, most school exams were completed orally and publicly. “Public examinations were generally held once a year and were more in the nature of public displays or exhibitions to show off brilliant pupils or to glorify teachers. It was as a result of abuses to which such displays gave rise and of the criticisms which they prompted that written exams began to be introduced” (Kandel, 1936, p. 24). It was in this climate in 1845, when Horace Mann challenged the common method of assessing students and created written exams; as the secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, his new exams received credibility and broad-scale acceptance and adoption (Garrison, 2009, pp. 95-97). “His (Mann’s) model was so successful that competitive written exams were adopted by school systems in nearly all U.S. cities, and in 1865, the New York Regents Exams were developed on the basis of Mann’s assessment concepts” (Gallagher, 2003, p. 85).

Even though society’s understanding of equality has evolved, the fundamental truth that “all men are created equal,” was laid down at the inception of our country (National Archives, 2019) and was further defined with Amendment XIV. These officially provided the foundational principles that guide and form educational accountability. Since the inception of the nation, the federal government has become increasingly involved in education. Almost a century after that declaration, the federal government established the Department of Education in 1867, with an overall purpose of reporting on educational progress of the states and territories. This department was soon demoted to an Office of Education in 1868 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The Office of Education continued to operate under different titles and was housed by various

governmental agencies over the years until a cabinet position of Secretary of Education was re-established in 1979, during President Carter's administration.

Also, of monumental significance to the continual evolution of school accountability was the 1868 ratification of Amendment XIV to the U.S. Constitution. The equal protection clause of Amendment XIV has been interpreted by the Supreme Court to guarantee a wide range of fundamental rights to all citizens. As explained by U.S. Constitution experts, this equal protection clause emphasis that "No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the united states… nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws," was clearly intended to stop state governments from discriminating against black Americans, and over the years would play a key role in many landmark civil rights cases (History.com Editors, 2020). The protections asserted in Amendment XIV guided the formation of the school accountability measures in the United States.

The federal government, through various Presidents of the United States and legislative acts, became increasingly involved in education over the years. A federal Department of Education was established back in 1867 with an overall purpose of reporting on educational progress of the states and territories. Unlike the current Department of Education, it had an appointed commissioner instead of a secretary. The collection, analysis, and dissemination of data to promote the efficacy of school systems was at the heart of the purpose for the Department of Education:

> That there shall be established, at the city of Washington, a department of education, for the purpose of collecting such statistics and facts as shall show the condition and progress of education in the several States and Territories, and of diffusing such information respecting the organization and management of schools and school systems, and methods

> of teaching, as shall aid the people of the United States in the establishment and maintenance of efficient school systems, and otherwise promote the cause of education throughout the country. (Sanger, 1867, p. 434)

There appears to be a clear connection with this collection, analysis, and dissemination of data and the eventual establishment of school accountability at both the federal and state level. However, due to concerns that the Department of Education would exercise too much control over local schools, the department was demoted to an Office of Education in 1868. The Office of Education continued to operate under different titles and was housed by various governmental agencies over the years (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

In 1922, Horace Mann Towner (not to be confused with the Horace Mann of 1845 mentioned previously), a congressman from Iowa, co-sponsored the Towner-Sterling bill, which, had it passed, would have re-created a cabinet-level department of education. This bill would have promoted academic educational attainments and measures on a national level through support via federal funding (National Education Association of the United States, 1922).

Interestingly, while promoting the establishment of a federal Department of Education, the official stance of the bill remained supportive of state (and to a lesser extent, territory) control of education:

> Who is advocating Federal control of education? Certainly not those who are supporting the proposition to establish a Department of Education and extend the established principle of Federal aid for the promotion of education. They are the ones who are most strongly opposed to Federal control of education within the States. What they seek is Federal aid and cooperation with the States in developing a stronger, better trained, more

intelligent American citizenship. (National Education Association of the United States, 1922, p. 12)

The major priority for the Towner-Sterling Bill was to promote literacy among the nation's citizenry (National Education Association of the United States, 1922, pp. 27-29). An annual influx of hundreds of thousands of immigrants were admitted to the United States after World War I. The high percentage of illiteracy among those immigrants, as well as those previously residing in the United States, was concerning to the general populous. Even though the bill, which addressed those concerns, did not pass in 1922, the bill portrayed a strong public sentiment that there was a large educational deficit at the time and laid a foundation of supporting these ideals in later years. The authors of the Towner-Sterling Bill felt those who were in opposition were either ignorant or had motive to deliberately bring about federal bureaucratic control of education in the United States. Those opposing the proposition favored extending federal aid for the promotion of education. Those thought to be in favor of the Towner-Sterling Bill were those who were interested in public education, as well as a limited number of those who represented private educational institutions, including the departments of education from privately endowed universities (National Education Association of the United States, 1922, p. 7).

An increased demand for educational accountability and the drive to provide an appropriate education led the government to address issues of educational inequity based on racial and economic factors and to the Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). A revolutionary movement of educational accountability ensued. "This idea came to be known as 'school accountability,' and was built around three principles: Creating rigorous academic standards, measuring student progress against those standards, and attaching some

consequence to the results" (McKenzie, 2015, p. 1). School districts and state education systems became increasingly accountable to policymakers and taxpayers to provide an appropriate education, based on the three principles of school accountability, for every student. This demand for accountability led to the monumental and unprecedented educational reforms of the 1960s.

President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This law required the commissioner of education to conduct and report on a survey concerning the lack of availability of equal educational opportunities for individuals by reason of race, color, religion, or national origin in public educational institutions (The Civil Rights Act, 1964). A sociologist from Johns Hopkins University, James Coleman, was commissioned with the task to gather a team and survey the entire United States and offer conclusions about the equity, or fairness, of public education. This was a difficult and unprecedented task, partly because it was in Coleman's nature to be very thorough, to consider various angles, and to try to put aside any personal biases. In addition, prior to this study, funding and resource distribution were not carefully collaborated or reported on a large national scale. Another factor that added to the complexity of this study was that nationwide standardized tests did not yet exist. Coleman analyzed his findings from a sampling of 600,000 students and 60,000 teachers from 4,000 schools throughout the nation (The Civil Rights Act, 1964).

It is interesting to note that Coleman recognized holistic education as part of the responsibilities of schools, which in addition to academic subjects, included measuring intelligence, attitudes, and qualities of character. What Coleman ultimately determined to measure and what he considered to be most important was "intellectual skills, such as reading, writing, calculating, and problem solving" (Coleman, 1966, p. 20). It can also be implied that Coleman believed the purpose of education was to help society and individuals acquire gainful

future employment when he stated, “What they [these tests or intellectual skills] measure are the skills which are among the most important in our society for getting a good job and moving up to a better one, and for full participation in an increasingly technical world” (Coleman, 1966, p. 20).

The Coleman Report, more formally known as The Equality of Educational Opportunity Report, resulted in lengthy and involved findings (Coleman, 1966). As was expected, the report confirmed that segregation indeed existed and that there were academic disparities between African American and Caucasian students. However, what was surprising was the conclusion that the biggest determinant of how well a child would learn was a student’s family background (including value placed on education and the family’s financial security), coupled with a diverse socioeconomic mix in the classroom (Dickinson, 2016, pp. 1, 3-4).

Karl Alexander, one of Coleman’s colleagues and a fellow sociology professor at Johns Hopkins University shared,

> It was understood that the performance of poor children [both black and white] lagged behind that of the majority of whites, and the thinking was that this was due to deficiencies in the schools they attended. Coleman used test score disparities as indicative of unequal opportunity and then sought to find the sources, looking beyond indicators of school quality. They introduced that idea as a way to understand educational inequality, and it was radical in its framing. (Dickinson, 2016, p. 3)

Prior to the conclusion of the Coleman Report, many had an assumption that the responsibility for education rested solely on teachers. In contradiction to this assumption, during an interview about the report’s findings, Coleman stated, “a child’s learning is a function more of the characteristics of his classmates than of those of the teacher” (Dickinson, 2016, p. 3).

Furthermore, in the same interview, when responding to a question about class integration, Coleman stated:

> It would have been easy to accomplish class integration in the United States 100, or even 50, years ago when we didn't have the kind of residential segregation by class that we have now. In dense and large urban areas, class integration is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. What I think is needed in the long run is a new and totally different solution to what comprises a school. I would characterize this approach as a breaking apart of the school where some of the child's activities are carried out in one setting, others in another setting. Some of these activities would be class-integrated, but not all need be. When a child has a diverse array of educational settings, then it's not necessary for every one of those settings to be class-integrated. (King, 1972, p. 8)

Much of what Coleman surmised became foundational in the national development of school accountability.

In 1967, Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which resulted in significant public funding for primary and secondary education through Title programs (Beyer & Johnson, 2014). Many consider ESEA to be the most far-reaching federal legislation affecting education. In fact, speaking of this act, President Johnson said, “As President of the United States, I believe deeply no law I have signed or will ever sign means more to the future of America” (McKenzie, 2015, p. 2). This act resulted in providing significant public funding for primary and secondary education. The premise of the act was to provide each child with fair and equal opportunities to achieve an exceptional education. The ESEA was monumental and has proved to have significant and enduring influence on public education in

the United States (U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Education and Labor. General Subcommittee on Education, 1965).

Sections of the original 1965 Act included:

- Title I – Financial Assistance to Local Educational Agencies For The Education Of Children Of Low-Income Families
- Title II – School Library Resources, Textbooks, and other Instructional Materials
- Title III – Supplementary Educational Centers and Services
- Title IV – Educational Research and Training
- Title V – Grants to Strengthen State Departments Of Education
- Title VI – General Provisions

(U.S. Congress. Committee on Labor and Public Welfare. Subcommittee on Education., 1965)

The first years following 1965 included two amendments to the original 1965 Act:

1966 amendments (Public Law 89-750)

- Title VI – Aid to Handicapped Children (1965 title VI became Title VII) 1967 amendments (Public Law 90-247)
- Title VII – Bilingual Education Programs (1966 title VII became Title VIII; Beyer & Johnson, 2014). Since the passage of ESEA in 1965, there have been nine reauthorizations, the latest being ESSA (Kemp, 2020).

The premise of ESEA was to provide children from disadvantaged backgrounds with fair and equal opportunities to a good education. The Coleman Report, which was published in 1966, confirmed the need for educational accountability. The report exposed large gaps in achievement

between student demographics, especially in socioeconomic, race/ethnicity and gender groupings (Dickinson, 2016).

Federal Involvement in Education Based on ESEA and The Nation's Report Card and ESEA

In 1967, the Bilingual Education Act (BEA) (Bilingual Education Act, 1967, p. 816), also known as Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1967 (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965, p. 783), recognized the needs of Limited English Speaking Ability (LESA) students. This act was unprecedented in that it was the first federal legislation in the United States to provide educational funding to establish innovative educational programs for students with limited English speaking ability (Stewner-Manzanares, 1988). This legislation was historically significant because it initiated a focus on students who were learning English as a second language. Its passage represented, "a shift from the notion that students should be afforded equal educational opportunity to the idea that educational policy should work to equalize academic outcomes, even if such equity demanded providing different learning environments" (Petrzela, 2010, p. 408). This legislation influenced a significant portion of school accountability measures since its inception to the current ESSA mandates.

Influenced by The Coleman Report, in 1969 Congress implemented the only ongoing standardized national assessment called the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This assessment is administered yearly to a representative sample group of students from across the United States. Students are assessed in mathematics, reading, science and writing. Results are organized and reported according to gender, race/ethnicity, school location, socio-economic status, disabilities, English language learners, type of school, etc. Results are

publicly aggregately reported and are known as The Nation's Report Card (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018, p. 1).

In 1974, President Richard Nixon promoted a law which was approved and was called the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA). This law took a stand against faculty, staff, and student discrimination, as well as student segregation based on race. This law, along with others such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA), and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), provided equal participation for students by removing related barriers. Ultimately, these laws also had considerable influence on the evolvement of school evaluation (Equal Educational Opportunities Act, 1974).

In 1979, President Jimmy Carter established the Department of Education as a cabinet level position. Its purpose was to support schools and the overall educational system at local, state, and national levels (Wallechinsky, 2016). President Carter appointed Shirley Hufstedler, a law practitioner, as the nation's first Secretary of Education (Education Week Library, 2017).

The second Secretary of Education, under President Ronald Reagan's leadership, was Terrel Howard Bell. T. H. Bell has strong ties in Utah, having been a teacher, Utah's Commissioner of Higher Education, and the superintendent of both Weber and Granite School Districts (College of Education, 2019).

In the 1980s, fueled by Republican arguments against the Department of Education, Ronald Reagan made a campaign promise to downgrade it, stating "Welfare and education are two functions that should be primarily carried out at the state and local levels" (Bauman & Read, 2018, p. 1). President, Reagan did not reauthorize the ESEA Act of 1965; instead, persuaded by T. H. Bell in 1981, President Reagan commissioned a study to assess the quality of education.

The findings were published by Bell in 1983 and were titled "*A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*" (Kosar, 2011). Essentially, the report concluded that schools were underachieving on both national and international measures. Thirty-eight recommendations were given, which influenced the direction of school accountability efforts in subsequent years. President Ronald Reagan actually intended to dismantle the federal Office of Education initially, but ironically, as a result of his commission to evaluate and compare the school system, many contend he ended up both expanding and arguably legitimizing the federal role in public education (Kosar, 2011).

In response to *A Nation at Risk*, President George H. W. Bush convened an education summit with the nation's governors in 1989, which resulted in the National Education Goals Panel (National Education Goals Panel, 2002). In attendance were 49 of the nation's Governors (missing the governor from Minnesota) (Alexander, 2004; Klein, 2014). "It was a very optimistic time: We really thought, as governors, that we could really make a difference, and we could do it over a relatively short period of time. The White House was right with us," said Thomas H. Kean, an early leader in the standards movement who took part in the event as the Republican governor of New Jersey. "We haven't had a moment like that since, on any subject" (Klein, 2014, p. 18).

As might be expected when an education summit is convened with federal officials and governors from nearly every state, there were disagreements in trying to find an acceptable balance between federal and state funding. However, this was also a time of unification and bi-partisan cooperation, as there was an increasing nation-wide desire to improve educational accountability. As part of President Bush's emphasis, he promoted early childhood intervention by stating that he wanted every child to start school ready to learn. He also shared that he

expected the high school graduation rate to rise to at least 90 percent. He expected the United States to lead the world in math and science and stated that "Every student would leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency in English, mathematics, science, history, and geography" (Klein, 2014, p. 18).

Federal Involvement in School Accountability, Public Reporting, and ESEA Reauthorizations

Resulting from this summit, and as part of ESEA's 1994 reauthorization President Bush presented six (later expanded to eight) goals:

1. All children will start school ready to learn.
2. The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90%.
3. All students will become competent in challenging subject matter.
4. Teachers will have the knowledge and skills that they need.
5. U.S. students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.
6. Every adult American will be literate.
7. Schools will be safe, disciplined, and free of guns, drugs, and alcohol.
8. Schools will promote parental involvement and participation.

(National Education Goals Panel, 2002)

These National Education Goals were known as Goals 2000. The goals included school readiness through pre-kindergarten support, as well as objectives that promoted student nutrition, physical activity, and health care. Academic objectives supported English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, geography, citizenship, health, community service, and personal responsibility (National Education Goals, 1993, p. 1). States applied for federal funding to support these goals and funding was used for a variety of

initiatives, ranging from developing school improvement plans to promote technology literacy. Congress discontinued funding for Goals 2000 On December 21, 2001.

During President Clinton's term of office, being influenced by the education summit, ESEA was reauthorized and updated in 1994 and was known as the *Improving America's Schools Act of 1994* (IASA; U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Education and Labor, 1994). This reauthorization required states to report on disaggregated scores from state assessments of academic achievement that compared various sub-groups of students. The report was known as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). This federal public reporting requirement was the first of its kind and foundational to the current school grading/reporting requirement of school accountability (Congressional Research Service Report, 2009).

These education summit goals were reported annually through AYP to satisfy legal requirements under the "Parents' Right to Know" provisions. AYP reflected proficiency and growth scores from three categories of indicators: Reading/Language Arts, Mathematics, and Additional Academic Indicators (such as graduation and attendance rates). Assessment data were included on AYP reports from the following categories: All Students, Major Racial & Ethnic groups, Students with Disabilities, Limited English Proficient, Economically Disadvantaged, and while not among the required subgroups for AYP, data for the subgroups of Migrant and Gender were collected for reporting purposes only. AYP scores were reported on a state, district, and school level. (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, pp. 10-12). Required reporting to parents was a precursor to current school grading requirements in ESSA.

As another reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which was passed in 2001 (No Child Left Behind Act,

2001), more fully promoted standards-based education reform. It was based on the premise that individual educational outcomes would improve through setting high standards and establishing measurable goals. Through NCLB, the role of the federal government expanded even further. An emphasis was placed on more openly published school report cards which included a report of annual academic progress based on annual testing as shown in Figure A1.

Figure A1

Example of School-Level Accountability (AYP) Reporting

Student Group	Reading/Language Arts		Mathematics		Additional Academic Indicators	
	Percent Tested Goal: 100%[6]	Percent Proficient & Advanced Goal: 60%	Percent Tested Goal: 100%[6]	Percent Proficient & Advanced Goal 60%	Graduation Rate Goal: 85%	Attendance Rate Goal 92%
All Students						
African American						
American Indian/ Native Alaskan						
Asian/Pacific Islander						
Hispanic						
White						
Students with Disabilities[7]						
Limited English Proficient						
Economically Disadvantaged						

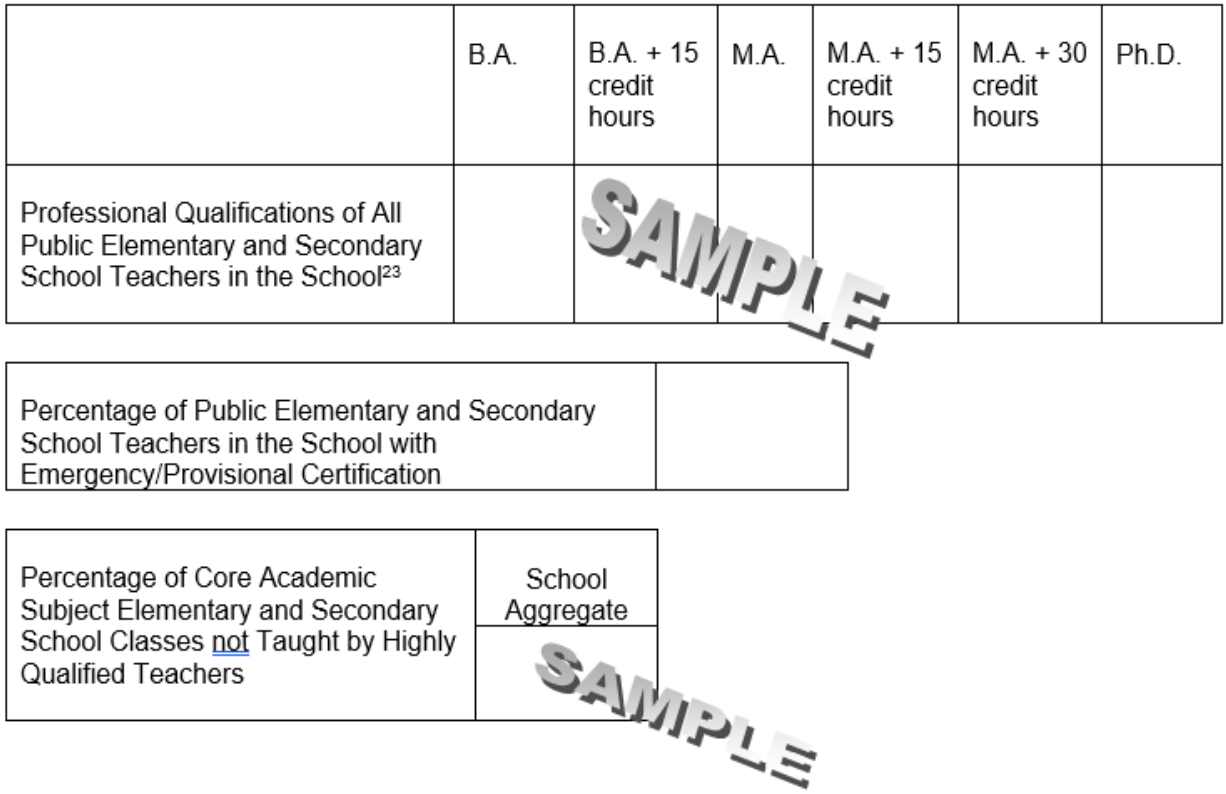
Note. (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, pp. 10-12)

Teacher qualifications were also required to be reported on as shown in Figure A2. These required reporting on professional qualifications, such as degrees and licensure, those teaching

with emergency or provisional credentials, and those determined by state standard to not be considered as highly qualified teachers.

Figure A2

Example of School-Level Teacher Quality Reporting



	B.A.	B.A. + 15 credit hours	M.A.	M.A. + 15 credit hours	M.A. + 30 credit hours	Ph.D.
Professional Qualifications of All Public Elementary and Secondary School Teachers in the School[23]						

Percentage of Public Elementary and Secondary School Teachers in the School with Emergency/Provisional Certification	

Percentage of Core Academic Subject Elementary and Secondary School Classes not Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers	School Aggregate

Note. (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, pp. 22-23)

Similar reporting was also required at the state level and it was permissible for additional non-required information to be included on the school report card.

Under NCLB, schools were held accountable for meeting benchmark standards in all the sub-group categories identified on AYP reporting. “If one group of disadvantaged students underperformed, the entire school was considered underperforming” and this led many educational leaders and teachers to feel fear because of school accountability reforms (Turner, 2015, p. 2).

School accountability reforms were implemented by all states as a punitive component of NCLB for schools that did not meet benchmark standards (Hanushek & Raymond, 2005). States both publicized school performance on state-mandated testing and attached consequences to that performance. The punitive measures for schools included provisions such as "identifying failing schools, replacing a principal, allowing students to enroll elsewhere, and the takeover, closure, or reconstitution of a school" (Dee & Jacob, 2009, p. 8). The consequences of these school accountability reforms were among the reasons for increasing public and educator discontent with NCLB.

With increasing public dissatisfaction for NCLB and nearing the end of his presidential tenure, President Barack Obama reauthorized ESEA by initiating the ESSA in 2015 (Ujifusa, 2019). ESSA is currently being implemented under President Donald Trump's Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos (Ujifusa, 2018). Standardized testing is still required as is a state issued school report card. While ESSA still requires common compliance with various educational accountability measures such as implementing a school report card based on indicators in mandated subjects such as reading and math, provisions are included that allow greater autonomy for states to determine which type of school grading system and which additional optional indicators are most appropriate for their state. ESSA was the first reauthorization of ESEA to narrow the federal government's role in education since the 1980s as a result of this shift of accountability from the federal to the state level.

Many states have experienced significant controversy in their attempt to address educational accountability. For example, Florida implemented several state-mandated assessments, and controversially, school districts mandated additional assessments that even exceeded the state mandates. In fact, 52% of all assessments given to students in Florida were

district-mandated, not state mandated. Because of this, many in Florida's populous felt students were over tested (Lazarin, 2014). In Kentucky, the state required 4 tests per year, however, some school districts tested 20 times per year (McKenzie, 2015). Another example was an "opt-out" movement that spread to several states, including Utah, but especially those states between Colorado and Illinois. In New York, more than 550 principals protested excessive state testing. In addition to these examples is the controversy surrounding Common Core tests and standards (Lazarin, 2014).

ESSA requires five indicators of every state: academic *achievement* in reading and math; another academic indicator of a state's choosing, such as student *growth* in reading and math; four-year high school *graduation* rates, with the option to include extended-year rates -to help struggling students graduate who may need another year or two; progress toward *English language proficiency* (ELP) as determined by individual states; and at least one (may be several) *indicator of school quality or student success (state determined)*. The holistic approach to school grading finds opportunity in the fifth, state-determined indicator. Federal suggestions have been offered for the fifth indicator, or measure of school quality or student success, to include indicators for student or educator engagement; student access to and completion of advanced coursework; student postsecondary readiness; school climate and safety; and other indicators that meet ESSA's requirements (Batel, 2017). Many states have chosen to maintain a narrow approach to school grading by not taking advantage of the holistic allowance that ESSA provides of allowing balance and variety in indicators that make up part of the overall grade a school receives.

From her formation, historically speaking, many would agree that the United States of America has experienced significant overall progress in school accountability and school grading

(King, 2020). Policy analyst, Marga Mikulecky of the Education Commission of the States, reasoned that a national evolution in accountability efforts had occurred and as a result, student progress has improved over time (Mikulecky, 2014). Scholar Laura Jimenez, from the Center for American Progress, shared that ESSA promotes "a broader system for driving improvements and supports" that includes "a broad set of measures for student success" (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017, p. 1). Michael Petrilli, the President of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, shared his perspective of the evolution of school accountability and pointed out that accountability is evolving and improving (Petrilli, 2019). While some would like to see increased federal control, many believe the United States is currently headed in a good direction, due to the reduction of the federal government's role in state educational accountability. Generally, however, based on an analysis of the research this study provides in section four, policy makers continue to lack a holistic vision of school accountability.

Historical Overview of Educational Accountability in Utah

While Utah became a U.S. territory as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), which brought an end to the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), those who lived in what was known as the Great Basin applied for statehood in 1849 (Internet Archive, 2010; The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, 1848). Utah was not successful in applying for statehood five times (1849, 1856, 1862, 1872, 1882, and 1887) (Lythgoe, 1996). Well before Utah became a state, during the Territory of Utah's 1851 1st Annual Legislative Session, the importance of establishing and funding an educational system was clearly a priority as evidenced by a request for financial support that was directed to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States Congress:

> Your memorialists, the Governor and Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah, feeling a deep interest in the promotion of a general system of education, and the general diffusion of knowledge among all classes; and laboring under the difficulties incident to the settlement of all new territories, and especially those so far removed from the confines of civilization; and feeling grateful to the General Government for the valuable Library furnished our Territory… and having no resources on which to base the establishment of a school fund, respectfully pray your honorable body to grant that the sum of twenty-four thousand dollars, appropriated for… the use and support of schools. (Utah Legislative Assembly, 1851, pp. 229-230)

This financial endowment was approved on 3 March 1852.

The first official charge in Utah for a report of a school came in 1890, when a public school report was required twice each year on school attendance, English language arts, and the system of public instruction (Utah Legislative Assembly, 1890). A position for a Utah commissioner of schools, as well as a superintendent of schools in each county was called for. As a result of this bill, a public-school report was required twice each year. Several items were required to be reported on, including the following:

> A full statement of the condition and amount of all funds and property appropriated for the purposes of education; the number and grade of schools in each county, the number of children in each county between the ages of six and eighteen years, the number of such attending district schools, the average number of children that have attended district schools during the two school years previous to July first of that year, the number that can read and write, the amount of school money raised by county taxation or otherwise,

> the amount expended for salaries of teachers, and for building schoolhouses. (Utah Legislative Assembly, 1890, pp. 110-113)

This was likely the first formal school reporting requirement in Utah: reporting on school attendance and English language arts. In addition, in what may be considered as the first requirement for publicly reporting on Utah schools, the commissioner of schools was required to report biennially on the system of public instruction. He was required to print one thousand copies of his report in "pamphlet form and distribute them to all school officers and schools" (Utah Legislative Assembly, 1890, p. 111).

While requirements for teacher licensing and qualifications were established earlier, in the Legislative Session of 1894, teachers were required to be proficient in many areas.

> No certificates shall be granted unless the applicant can be found proficient in, and qualified to teach the following branches, namely: pedagogics, reading, writing, spelling, English grammar, geography, United States history, arithmetic, physiology and hygiene, and in addition such other English branches as the board of Education may prescribe. (Utah Legislative Assembly, 1894, p. 110)

This requirement shows subjects where Utah society at the time placed value on school curriculum.

Utah eventually became a state in 1896 (Lythgoe, 1996) and the original Utah State Constitution addressed many issues pertaining to education. Some of the educational issues that were addressed included policy that required schools to be nonsectarian (Article III and X), open to all children of the State (Article X, section 1), free of charge (Article X, section 2), to provide financial benefit through the proceeds of all lands -later referred to as the Land Trust (Article III, section 3), and supervision given to a State Board of Education and others as approved and

overseen by the State Legislature (Article X, section 8) (Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1991).

The Utah State Legislative Session of 1897, in addition to establishing a state office of education, required public reporting of school progress in Utah. The report was intended to be conducted annually so comparisons of multiple years of growth could be noted. The report included items such as "the condition of the school, the mental and moral instruction given, the methods employed by the teacher, and the progress of the pupils" (Utah 2nd Legislature, 1897, pp. 113-117). School discipline was an included measure. Holistic accountability was encouraged: "He shall see that the pupils are instructed in the several branches of study required by law to be taught in the schools, as far as they are qualified to pursue them" (Utah 2nd Legislature, 1897, pp. 113-117).

An effort towards unifying state curriculum was made in 1907. The State Legislature enacted the following law:

> Within thirty days after the adoption of text-books the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Principal of the State Normal School, the Principal of the State Normal Training School and two County School Superintendents to be appointed by the State Board of Education, shall meet and prescribe a Course of Study for the Schools of the State not included in county school districts of the first class and in cities of the first and the second class, and shall furnish at actual cost to each county the number of courses of study ordered by the county superintendent of schools. (Utah 7th Legislature, 1907, p. 41)

In 1923, when the United States Congress was considering creating a federal Department of Education through the approval of the Towner-Sterling Act (as mentioned in the prior section

of this appendix), the 15th Utah Legislature officially supported and offered encouragement to support those federal decisions (Utah 15th Legislature, 1923). This official support conveys a sentiment from Utah's populous which placed value on and encouraged literacy and educational accountability. A national sentiment similar to the sentiment evidenced in Utah evolved until eventually President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act as shared in the preceding section.

In the early 1990s, the populous in Utah desired more oversight in school accountability and student achievement. Under direction resulting from Utah House Bill Number 321, statewide norm-referenced assessments first began in 1990 with the SAT9 (Stanford Achievement Test 9) where students in grades 2, 5, 8, and 11 were tested in reading, math, and science. The introduction of this bill, which was titled, "Achievement Tests in the Public Schools" offers this description of the bill:

> An act relating to public education; Providing the State Board of Education to require statewide achievement testing in the public schools; Requiring the board to develop a testing method to obtain an accurate estimate of statewide performance of students; Requiring a plan to accurately analyze and report the results of the testing program; Requiring scoring of tests by the State Office of Education unless otherwise required; Prohibiting specific preparation for tests given under the program; and Providing an effective date. (Bradford, 1990, p. 1)

It is interesting that HB0321 offers this overriding purpose: "It is the intent of the Legislature in enacting this part to determine the effectiveness of school districts and schools in assisting students to master the fundamental educational skills towards which instruction is directed" (Bradford, 1990, p. 2). This causes one to wonder what the Legislature considered to

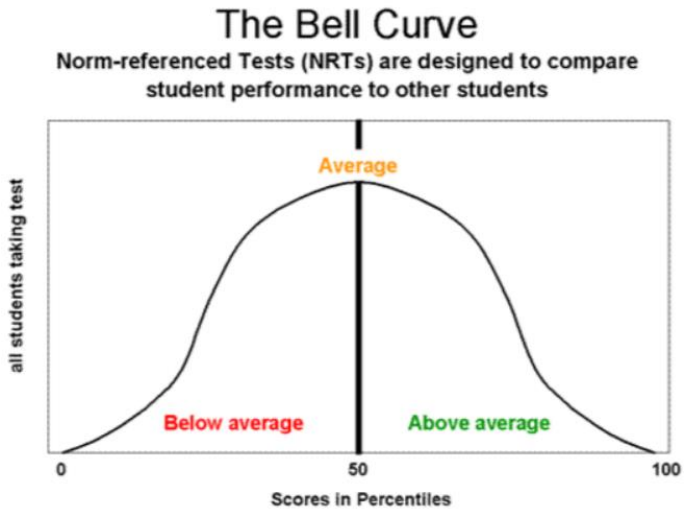
be “fundamental educational skills.” As read further in the bill, “Basic skills course” is described on page three in the document as “a subject which requires, among other skills, memorization and mastery of specific functions, including reading, spelling, basic mathematics, science, and effectiveness of written expression.” The bill also required Utah to participate in the NAEP (National Assessment of Education Progress) in 1992 and it was administered in that same year (Bradford, 1990, p. 3).

Assessments

Nearly all accountability systems utilize and require some type of assessment. Two common forms of assessments were woven in public education, norm-referenced tests and criterion-referenced tests. The Bell Curve, as shown in Figure A3, is used to compare student performance on norm-referenced tests. “The primary goal of norm-referenced assessments is to provide information to assist educators in improving teaching. Based on a percentile rank, the scores indicate how well students perform in tested subjects compared to a national norm group of students” (Schaeffer, 2016, p. 5).

Figure A3

The Bell Curve



Criterion-Referenced Tests, such as the NAEP, assess the knowledge, skills, and abilities of students in the areas of English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science, as outlined in the Utah Core Standards. Each individual student is compared with a preset standard for acceptable achievement -below and above proficient. Any student can achieve the proficient standard. Student achievement is reported for the individual skills in order to target instruction (Schaeffer, 2016, p. 12).

While there were certainly annual academic achievement assessments administered previously, in 1999, Utah began to administer statewide criterion-referenced assessments, beginning with the Criterion-Referenced Test, often referred to as CRTs, for grades 3-11. These tests evaluated English language arts, math, and science. In addition to the CRTs that were required for all grades (3-11), in March 1999 the Utah legislature passed House Bill 33 which required an expanded mandatory "basic-skills" assessment program. This new law required assessment in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11 and included a comparison report taken from a national sample. The assessment was called Utah Performance Assessment System for Students. The Utah Basic Skills Competency Test was administered to high school students, grades 10-12 and was administered from 2006 until 2013 (Schaeffer, 2016). The Direct Writing Assessment was first administered in 2003 to grades 6 and 9 (later 5 and 8) (Goerts & Duffy, 2001). The SAT9 was used for a few years and required assessment in reading, mathematics, language, science, and social studies.

In determining student proficiency, the Utah State Office of Education switched from requiring the SAT9 to the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in 2005 (Glavin, 2020; Schaeffer, 2016). Time and money were among the reasons for the switch. The ITBS required about half the amount of time to administer as the SAT9 did and ITBS was also less expensive. The ITBS

assessed students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11 in the subjects of reading, language arts, math, social studies, and science. These norm-referenced assessments assessed students in vocabulary, word analysis, reading comprehension, listening, language, mathematics, social studies, science, and sources of information. Assessment results were made available in the form of raw scores, percent correct, grade equivalent, developmental standard score, and percentile rank. Districts and schools would use the summary data to guide curriculum and instructional planning (Colby & Yudof, 2005; Glavin, 2020).

As NCLB continued to be implemented, many showed continued support, as evidenced by bipartisan support and the collaboration of civil rights and business groups (Klein, 2015). One of the creators and the spokesperson for NCLB was the United States Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings. She stated:

> For the first time ever, we are holding ourselves accountable for ensuring every child—regardless of race, income or special need—can read and do math on grade level. The latest nation's education report card shows we're on the right track, but we must pick up the pace to close the achievement gap and get every child to grade level or above by 2014. (Colby & Yudof, 2005, p. 3; Wertheimer, 2010)

Even with many initial supporters, however, criticism increased for NCLB. Even Secretary Spellings stated, “The name No Child Left Behind sadly did become a toxic brand” (Wertheimer, 2010, p. 2). In addition to sanctions that were considered by many to be unreasonable, one of the major points of criticism was with the goal that every child would be proficient by the year 2014. Educators and state officials argued that as desirable and altruistic as that goal was, it was unrealistic. In response to this increasing controversy, Patti Harrington, Utah State School Superintendent stated,

> No Child Left Behind is a flawed federal law. The tenets of the law, of course, we agree with enormously. We believe in the philosophy entirely in Utah. But when you get to the details, it's very difficult to live with the law and to make sense of it as it relates to helping children succeed. The law is based upon a premise that's inaccurate. It's based upon the premise that all kids will be proficient by the year 2014. That's unrealistic and, in my vocabulary, it's very ludicrous, as well. (Holman, 2005, p. 1)

In 2006, 20 states requested to join a pilot for NCLB Growth Models. Utah was among those but was not selected as one of the pilot participants. The growth model pilot was designed to "test whether growth-based accountability models show promise as a fair and reliable way of measuring improvement and holding schools accountable for achievement under the law" (Olson, 2006, p. 2). Those at the federal levels of government were not completely closed to the idea. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings said:

> We're open to new ideas, but we're not taking our eye off the ball. There are many different routes for states to take, but they all must begin with a commitment to annual assessment and disaggregation of data. And they all must lead to closing the achievement gap and every student reaching grade level by 2014. This is good policy for all students, and we must stick with it. (Colby & Yudof, 2005, p. 1)

Some considered this ongoing controversy to be the beginning of the end of NCLB.

In March 2011, Utah created the Utah Comprehensive Accountability System, which was charged with the following guiding principles:

1. Promote progress toward and achievement of college and career readiness
2. Value both meeting standards (proficiency) and improving academic achievement (growth)

3. All schools, including those that serve traditionally low performing students, should have an opportunity to demonstrate success
4. Strong incentives for schools to improve achievement for the lowest performing students
5. Growth expectations for non-proficient students should be linked to attaining proficiency
6. Growth expectations for all students, including students above proficiency, should be appropriately challenging and meaningful
7. Clear and understandable to stakeholders

The Utah Comprehensive Accountability System was intended to be a way to provide a clear reporting of school performance using indicators and measures that were already established (Utah State Office of Education, 2012).

National ESSA State Indicators, Measures, and School Grading May Influence Utah's Direction

A school grading bill passed in 2011, which required letter grades to be assigned annually to schools throughout Utah (Utah Board of Education, 2013). School grades were based primarily on growth and performance measures from statewide assessments (Utah State Office of Education, 2013).

As discontentment throughout the United States increased with NCLB, in 2011 President Obama authorized ESEA flexibility, with the intent that improvements would be shown in academic achievement and quality of instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Some feel this formality was a precursor that led to the implementation of the current ESSA. Even prior to the bipartisan ESSA of 2015, several states began to take advantage of this authorized

flexibility and implemented indicators and measures to promote a more holistic educational approach of school accountability.

As written in ESSA law, in determining school accountability, there are five required indicators:

1. Academic *achievement* in reading and math
2. Another academic indicator, such as student *growth* in reading and math
3. Four-year high school *graduation* rates, with the option to include extended-year rates
4. Progress toward *English language proficiency* (ELP)
5. At least one *measure of school quality or student success (state determined)*

While not required, federal suggestions have been offered for the fifth indicator. These include student or educator engagement; student access to and completion of advanced coursework; student postsecondary readiness; school climate and safety; and other measures that meet ESSA's requirements (Batel, 2017, p. 2). Under these guidelines, ample flexibility is afforded to states-- a drastic change from the policies of previous decades.

Utah Legislators have the challenge of aligning past and current state law with federal law. To build this alignment between ESSA and Utah State Law (State S.B. 220), Utah has adopted and defined measures that align with ESSA mandates, as well as a few other indicators. In a direction approximating holistic education, the Utah State Board of Education described this effort: "These additional indicators are intended to expand the definition of successful schools and capture more of the work schools do to help students" (Utah State Board of Education, 2019c, p. 6). These additional indicators include growth scores in science, language arts, and math, proficiency scores in science, English learner progress, and growth of the lowest performing 25% of students.

Along with the annual school grade report that was implemented in 2011, Utah recently provided schools the option to choose and describe up to two additional pieces of information about how each school is supporting students. This was first included in the school report card for the 2018-2019 school year. The Utah State Board of Education explained, "These self-reported indicators are not factored into school accountability calculations, but provide the opportunity for schools to highlight successful programs or practices in addition to the indicators included in school accountability" (Utah State Board of Education, 2019b, p. 1). Although these self-reported indicators were not factored into a school's letter grade, this was a positive step for Utah in reporting on and including direction towards more holistically representing school accountability.

Due to flexibility afforded in ESSA plans, there was a wide variety of indicators and measures included in state plans across the United States. States were given great latitude in determining which indicators to use, how those indicators are evaluated, and the weight ascribed to each indicator that determines the school grade. While this is further explained and analyzed in the Findings and Discussion section of this study, some of these indicators included reducing chronic absenteeism, general attendance, lower grade literacy, English language proficiency, accelerated learners, science, student engagement, community service learning, computer science, suspension/discipline rate, physical fitness, fine arts, performing arts, social studies, classroom organization, emotional support, world languages, early childhood education, school climate, library education, lowest performing students growth, student engagement, Spanish-language proficiency, military readiness, writing, and equity (Klein, 2017b, p. 1).

> Beyond school ratings, state accountability systems are somewhat abstract at the school and classroom levels. SEAs [State Education Agency] tend to leverage accountability

systems to incentivize behaviors that improve outcomes for students and facilitate equitable access to high-quality educational opportunities. However, there often exists a gap between the intended system impact and how behaviors change" (D'Brot, 2018, p. 2). A variety of approaches for school ratings exist among the states, such as A-F letter grades, point index systems, tiered rating systems, dashboard coding, and categorical ratings (Klein, 2017b).

Assessments, School Grading, and Reporting

A school grading bill passed in the 2011 Utah legislative session (53A-1-1101), which required letter grades to be assigned to schools throughout Utah (Utah Board of Education, 2013). School grades were based primarily on growth and performance measures from statewide assessments (Utah State Office of Education, 2013).

In 2013, Utah's governor, Gary Herbert, made recommendations to the Utah legislature for education and economic development. The measurable component of the plan was for 66% of all working-age Utahns to achieve a post-secondary degree or certificate by 2020 (Herbert, 2013). This plan, implemented in 2014, included performance goals for kindergarten through college. To outline and support these goals, an annual PACE report was provided for the public, which featured four key aspects (Jordan High School, 2015):

- P - Prepare Young Learners
- A – Access for All Students
- C – Complete Certificates and Degrees
- E – Economic Alignment

Associated with PACE are key assessment and performance goals:

- 90% proficiency in 3rd grade Reading
- 90% proficiency in 3rd grade Math

- 90% proficiency in 6th grade Reading/Language Arts
- 90% proficiency in 6th grade Math
- 90% of students reaching a composite score of 18 on the ACT
- 90% high school graduation rate

At the end of the 2013-2014 school year, computer adaptive testing became a required component of annual assessment tests in Utah and was implemented with the criterion-referenced SAGE test (Student Assessment of Growth and Excellence). Schools were again given a publicly reported letter grade annually based on achievement (student proficiency) and growth (student improvement) scores of students in grades 3-10, as assessed in language arts, mathematics, and science(Utah State Board of Education, 2019c). However, while report cards were still published, due to test interruptions and inaccuracies in reporting, the issuance of letter grades was suspended for the 2018-2019 school year (Utah State Board of Education, 2019a). Due to the Co-vid 19 pandemic, Utah schools canceled end-of-year testing in 2020. It remains to be seen how or if school report cards will be issued.

In 2015, coinciding with the implementation of another reauthorization of ESEA, or the ESSA, Utah schools began providing a new assessment called RISE (Readiness Improvement Success Empowerment) to students in grades 3-8. RISE replaced the SAGE test. Like the SAGE test, achievement and growth in language arts, math, science, as well as English learner progress and the growth of the lowest performing 25% were factored into percentages that equate to a letter grade. ESSA policy requires 95% participation rates on the state test, and this is in conflict with Utah's law to allow students to opt out of testing. In 2017, for instance, Utah was below the 95% allowance for participation, with 5.9% of students who opted out of state testing. Many schools in Utah took a hit on their school report cards because when test participation rates drop

below 95%, students are counted as if they took the state assessments and received a score of zero (Wood, 2018).

For elementary and middle schools, Utah requires counted students to be enrolled for the entire school year and allots 150 total possible points for school accountability based on every eligible student who is tested. Each of the four indicator areas, Achievement, Growth, Growth of the Lowest Performing 25%, and English Learner (EL) Progress are each given a weight value that equates to an overall score that a school may receive for students assessed in grades 3-8 in the areas of mathematics, English language arts, and science. Each subject area, Math, Science, and English Language Arts are allotted one third of the total points, or 18.667 points for each area. The combined total possible for these three areas is 56 points in both the Academic Achievement and the Academic Growth indicator areas.

Academic Achievement is allotted a total of 56 points possible. This amount accounts for 37% of the total points possible for schools, as demonstrated in Figure A4.

Figure A4

Formula for Determining Achievement Points for School Grading

$$Achievement\ Points = \left(\frac{Number\ of\ proficient\ scores}{Total\ number\ of\ scores}\right) x\ 56$$

Note. (Utah State Board of Education, 2019c, p. 17).

Academic Growth is a measurement of student annual academic performance regardless of present levels of proficiency. Academic Growth is allotted 56 possible points, accounting for 37% of the total points possible. The formula for Growth points is demonstrated in Figure A5.

Figure A5

Formula for Determining Growth Points for School Grading

$$Growth\ Points = \left(\frac{Summed\ weights\ for\ all\ students\ and\ subjects}{Total\ number\ of\ scores}\right) x\ 56$$

Note. (Utah State Board of Education, 2019c, p. 19).

Growth of the Lowest 25% of students in a school, also referred to as the lowest quartile (LQ) group, is also determined by comparisons of annual testing results from statewide assessments. There are 25 possible points allotted to this category. Student Growth Percentiles (SGP) convey a student's growth from the prior year. The calculation for this category is conveyed in Figure A6.

Figure A6

Formula for Determining Points Growth of the Lowest 25% of Students

$$Growth\ of\ of\ LQ\ Points = \left(\frac{LQ\ students\ with\ SGP\ of\ \geq 40}{All\ students\ in\ the\ LQ\ group}\right) x\ 25$$

Note. (Utah State Board of Education, 2019c, p. 20).

English Learner (EL) Progress is a measure of English language development and proficiency of EL students. Students are considered to achieve English proficiency when they have achieved a score of 5.0 on the annually administered WIDA ACCESS assessment. The WIDA ACCESS assessment evaluates reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Calculations for initial grade level, initial English language proficiency level, and the time enrolled in school are considered. Figure A7 shows the formula for the points allotted in this category.

Figure A7

Formula for Determining Points for English Learner (EL) Progress

$$Points = \left(\frac{Number\ of\ ELs\ making\ adequate\ progress + ELs\ reaching\ proficiency}{Total\ number\ of\ current\ EL\ students - first\ year\ ELs}\right) x\ 13$$

Note. (Utah State Board of Education, 2019c, p. 21).

For schools with fewer than 10% English language learners, the EL Progress indicator is removed, and the remaining three indicators receive greater weight as indicated in Figure A8.

Figure A8

Points and Weighing of Indicators for Elementary/Middle Schools

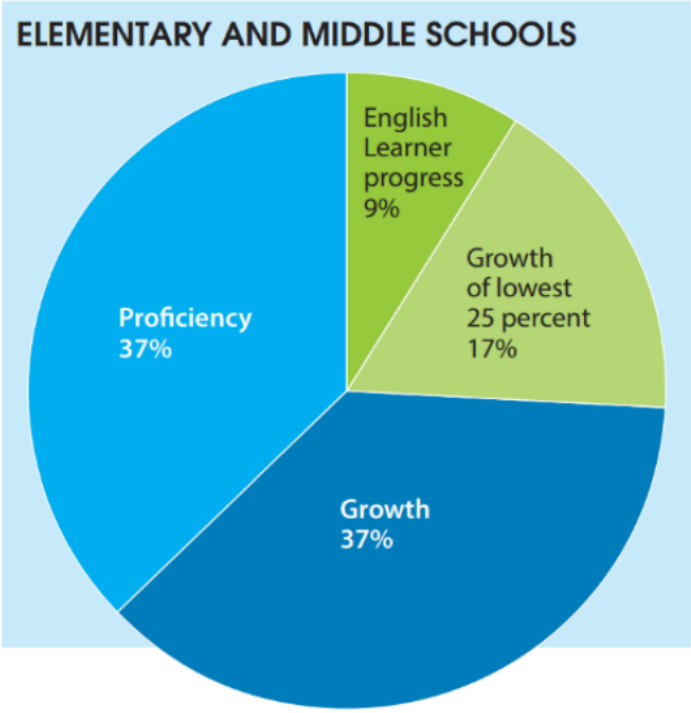
Indicator	Points	Percentage of Total	*Percentage with <10 ELs*
Achievement	56	37%	*41%*
Growth	56	37%	*41%*
EL Progress	13	9%	--
Growth of Lowest Performing 25%	25	17%	*18%*
Total	150	100%	*100%*

Note. (Utah State Board of Education, 2019c, p. 10).

A summary of points and weighting of indicators for elementary and middle schools is portrayed in Figure A9.

Figure A9

Summary of Points and Weighting of Indicators for Elementary and Middle Schools in Utah



Note. (Utah State Board of Education, 2019c, p. 16).

While letter grades may not technically be issued until the release of the 2020-2021 report card, the designation for the letter grades has been given and will likely apply to the school report card that results from the 2018-2019 assessment. This is still undecided as details from the cancelation of testing and issues surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic are not yet determined. However, based on Utah Code 53E-5-204, overall elementary and middle school ratings are defined based on the 150 possible points:

A – EXEMPLARY; 63.25% of the total points earned

B – COMMENDABLE; 57% of the total points earned

C – TYPICAL; 43.5% of the total points earned

D – DEVELOPING; 38% of the total points earned

F – CRITICAL; less than 8% of the total points earned

Schools received the descriptive rating (exemplary, commendable, etc.) without the associated letter grade for the assessment results from the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years (Utah State Board of Education, 2019c, pp. 9, 27). It is unknown at this time if letter grades will be issued for the 2019-2020 school year because annual assessments were not administered due to COVID-19 complications.

Scholarly Perspectives on Holistic School Accountability

Many education scholars have strong opinions as to whether school accountability measures should be more holistic or more focused. Supporting holistic education, Dr. Jane Hannaway and Dr. W. James Popham claim that while standardized testing is adequate in determining school quality, Hannaway argues that educators respond to incentives that promote assessed indicators which cause other learning goals to have less focus (Hannaway & Hamilton, 2008). Popham points out that standardized tests are the chief indicator by which most communities judge a school's success and that other knowledge often goes unrecognized (Popham, 1999).

Dr. M. Francis Klein argues the balance of effective curriculum decision-making requires collaboration at all levels -state, district, local community, site administrators, teachers, and even students. She emphasizes that educational approaches should be "effective, relevant, balanced, and current" (Klein, 1991, pp. 223-224).

Dr. Mindy L. Kornhaber and Dr. Helen Ladd promote holistic or well-rounded approaches to school accountability. Dr. Kornhaber supports a holistic accountability stance by pointing out her concerns with NCLB, which include work-arounds, narrowing of curriculum, over-emphasis on the bottom line, and the need for multiple indicators (Sunderman, 2007). Dr.

Ladd supports the idea that school accountability design matters and should include policies and strategies that would result in a more balanced accountability system instead of just focusing on test scores (Ladd, 2007). Dr. Ladd's standards-based reform movement supports the overall premise of equality of education that is promoted through ESEA by emphasizing educational attainment for all students, especially those from diverse socio-economic status (Ladd, 2007). Dr. Ladd also co-chairs a diverse group of policymakers and scholars who promote an approach called a Broader, Bolder Approach (BBA) to education policy. She "calls for school accountability that creates incentives to deliver a broad and well-rounded curriculum, including the arts, science, history, health and physical education, and character development" (Calderon, 2010, p. 1).

Other educators and scholars promote educational focus and evaluation that supports a holistic approach. Dr. Henry Levin calls for a greater focus on non-cognitive school outcomes, such as interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and capabilities as well as cognitive outcomes (Levin, 2012). Joshua P. Starr believes in school accountability based on balance through a variety of indicators. In support of this stance, Starr stated:

> Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, states and districts do have opportunities to collect and use data that go well beyond the traditional standardized tests. In particular, many school and system leaders are experimenting with complementary indicators that focus on social-emotional learning and career-readiness, topics that resonate with parents and can help place standardized test scores in context. (Starr, 2017, pp. 72-73)

Dr. Craig Hochbein argues in favor of a holistic approach to school grading. He declared:

> Ironically, the solution to the school grading problem is more measurement, not less. Current measurement and grading of academic performance only provide information

> about a single facet of the operation of a school. This singular focus not only facilitates manipulation, but also ignores inherent differences in schools and devalues the multitude of expectations demanded from schools… So, how do we improve things? If school constituents value an activity, I'd recommend that they find ways to measure it. For instance, how many students visited the city museum for the first time in their lives? What was the attendance at fine arts performances? How many hours do teachers spend beyond contract requirements? How many backpacks were sent home full of food? Then, value these measured activities by reporting results to important stakeholders. (Hochbein, 2013, p. 2)

Betsy DeVos, the U.S. Secretary of Education, promotes the vision that there should be flexibility in the state ESSA plans (Phenicie, 2018). Several scholars support the whole child and whole school community approach in school assessment. In support of taking advantage of the flexibility to adopt a variety of indicators under the ESSA plans is senior policy analyst Samantha Batel. Referring to state ESSA plans, Batel shared:

> These classifications are just one small part of effective accountability systems. A broad array of indicators of student and school success—that may not be appropriate to include in the classification system—can and should be used to inform improvement supports (Batel, 2017, p. 15).

In contrast to those who supported holistic education, there were those who were generally in opposition. For instance, Dr. Marshall S. Smith and Dr. Susan Fuhrman support a standards-based reform movement. They promote setting ambitious standards to a set of core academic subjects and aligning instruction and professional development towards the mastery of testing of these subjects (Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1991). In addition, Dr.

Paul Milgrom and Dr. John Roberts promote a narrow focus of only a few school goals (Milgrom & Roberts, 1994). Perhaps without fully realizing it, many of Utah's State Legislators and State School Board Members, educational policy makers, join this group by promoting a less holistic and primarily standards-based approach to school grading. This is evidenced by the limited variety of indicators included and required in Utah's ESSA plan.

Scholars are essentially divided into two groups: those who favor holistic approaches in education and those who do not. Those who favor holistic approaches generally support the idea that a well-rounded education will result in a society that is more balanced, while those who promote a more targeted approach generally place higher value on specific measures, such as mathematics or language arts than they do on other measures. These two perspectives are paramount to the approaches state legislators and school boards support. The best approach remains subjective. The findings in this study provide information worthy of considering as school grading proposals are developed and revised.

Summary

Addressing school accountability is challenging at best. Many of our required school accountability measures and publicly reported grading systems portray a narrow approach that promotes and reflects on only a few academic disciplines such as math, language, and science proficiency. ESSA allows states the opportunity to choose and broaden the selection of academic indicators and other measures that determine school grades. As will be shown in Appendix B, states, including Utah, are not taking full advantage of what the law allows by choosing to implement a strategic variety of indicators that collectively would provide a more accurate portrayal of school accountability. While Utah and other states certainly collect data and measure more than what is required from ESSA, the data that is not required by the state's ESSA plan is

not formulated in the grade schools receive on their state issued school report card. Policy makers in Utah and other states should consider whether their approach in complying with ESSA guidelines is limiting academic and non-academic learning due to endorsing a narrow approach of school accountability by implementing the minimum, or near minimum, that is required of ESSA.

ESSA allows greater school accountability autonomy for individual states. The diverse approaches among the 50 states to meet the mandates for ESSA could be significant. Drawing conclusions from the commonality as well as the differences in indicators and measures will yield interesting results that have the potential to influence the accountability belief system of groups and individuals who influence school accountability decisions.

APPENDIX B

Methodology

Description of Methodology

This descriptive study incorporating archival research reviewed K-8 school grading systems. The components of these systems with their indicators were collected and compared from two sequential time periods: first, referred to as "pre-ESSA," is the time period after NCLB and before ESSA plans were approved and second, current data from approved and currently implemented state ESSA plans, referred to as the "current ESSA" time period. The collection of this data is intended to help state education policy makers, such as members of the State Board of Education and State Legislators determine the following:

1. What are the state school grading systems and indicators that were in use just prior to ESSA), as well as those that are currently in place through ESSA, by all 50 states plus Washington, D.C.?
2. Does a comparison of the optional indicators found in each state's plan during these two time periods reflect a trend towards holistic approaches to school grading?
3. What state level school grading system and indicators were and are being implemented by the state of Utah?
4. Are Utah elementary and middle schools (K-8) being held accountable for indicators in Utah's state school grading system that represent a holistic approach?

Descriptive research is defined "as a research method that describes the characteristics of the population or phenomenon that is being studied. This methodology focuses more on the "what" of the research subject than the "why" of the research subject" (Bhat, 2020, p. 1). This study is considered a descriptive research since the methodological approach agrees with

characteristics that are known to describe descriptive research, such as quantitative data, uncontrolled variables, and providing a basis for further research. Finally, the data collected and analyzed has the potential of being further researched using various research techniques (Bhat, 2020, p. 2).

Nature of the Data

As NCLB was superseded by ESSA in 2015, but not yet clearly defined, states created, on their own, indicators and measures and systems for public school reporting. This post-NCLB (pre-ESSA) data revealed information pertaining to state-issued school grades and public reporting systems. This research also identified the various indicators implemented by each state for grading schools. A variety of approaches for school ratings existed among the states, such as A-F letter grades, point index systems, tiered rating systems, dashboard coding, and categorical ratings (Klein, 2017b).

Regarding grading schools, ESSA guidelines state that "Every state is required to annually differentiate across all schools" (Batel, 2017). This is the federal way of saying states must be able to compare schools by issuing publicly reported ratings or a school grading system such as A-F grading, numerical rating, categorical ratings like "Superior" or "Exceeds," or a "Star" system, or any of the other measures previously mentioned. Alternatively, some states are pursuing some form of a data dashboard that reports the results of individual measures annually (English, 2017). In addition, since there are similar indicators that are required in all state ESSA plans, such as academic achievement in reading and math, and progress toward English language proficiency (ELP), less focus was given to those areas in this study. Of special interest to this study was determining, comparing, and contrasting the additional indicators, commonly referred to as the fifth indicator. This fifth indicator is formally described as, "at least one measure of

school quality or student success." States could simply do the minimum and report on one additional indicator, or they could take greater advantage of what the law allows and report on multiple indicators. This study compiled and organized the data of this fifth indicator from all 50 states to determine if the fifth indicator(s) promoted a more holistic measure of accountability.

Source of the Data and Data Collection

Researching federal and state archival data were determined to be the most accurate and productive primary sources for acquiring relevant data, such as that found from the U.S. Department of Education (www.ed.gov) and the Utah State Board of Education (www.schools.utah.gov). Other data were compared and verified from a variety of sources, such as the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Education Commission of the States, The Alliance for Excellent Education, Education Week, and Achieve (Achieve, 2020; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2020; Education Commission of the States, 2018; Klein, 2017b; Wright & Petrilli, 2017). Data were compared and verified and were found to be consistent; however, data sources sometimes reported with differing emphasis depending on the source's focus or purpose.

Individual state ESSA plans were reviewed to determine the indicators and measures that each state chose to implement, as well as how states determined to differentiate between schools (public reporting of school grading). The data represented goals, indicators, and measures for schools in grades K-8. Since ESSA requirements are significantly different for 9-12 grade schools, this study focused primarily on data that corresponds with K-8 grade schools. In considering the federal ESSA requirements of public reporting for schools and the flexibility afforded to states to decide additional indicators and measures, the intent of this study was to compare the information gathered from the 50 states during these two time periods with the letter

grade reporting, indicators, and measures implemented in Utah (Utah State Board of Education, 2019c).

The information about state plans and the data necessary for this study were acquired from archival sources. Archival research is described as "research involving primary sources held in an archives, a Special Collections library, or other repository" (Georgia State University, 2019, p. 1). "Archival sources can be manuscripts, documents, records, objects, sound and audiovisual materials, or other materials" (Pearce-Moses, 2005, pp. 28.

Data Analysis

Analysis includes comparisons of indicators, measures, and school grading systems found in both current state ESSA plans as well as those used after the conclusion of NCLB and prior to the implementation of current ESSA plans. In order to ensure analysis integrity, the findings from this study were organized in a manner that is similar to the organizational method found in an article from the Center for American Progress, by Samantha Batel. Batel categorized and analyzed indicators from ESSA plans from 17 states (Batel, 2017). Batel portrayed ESSA indicators as they are required in the five following areas:

1. Academic achievement in reading and math
2. Another academic indicator, such as student growth in reading and math
3. Four-year high school graduation rates, with the option to include extended-year rates
4. Progress toward English language proficiency (ELP)
5. At least one measure of school quality or student success (state determined)

While this study's reporting approach is similar, there is variation in the approach of this study from Batel's study. This study focused on school grading systems and reporting of comparison of indicators from the pre-ESSA and current ESSA time periods of indicators for

grades K-8. Batel's study also focused on indicators and measures but focused more heavily on high school, or grades 9-12. She also omitted reference to school grading and locally determined indicators, while these are included in this study.

Grading systems and indicators, as well as state level school grading systems used during pre-ESSA and current-ESSA time periods were charted and graphed using Excel as a platform to visually portray and quantify where states had commonalities and differences in their plans. One of the primary results of this study allows conclusions to be made to determine whether states are using the flexibility given to them by the federal government through ESSA to address a holistic representation of school accountability and to give a comparative analysis of not only the number of indicators used, but also the nature of the indicators (academic, non-academic, attendance, SEL. etc.).

To assist in determining if Utah elementary and middle schools (K-8) are being held accountable for measures that represent holistic approaches to Utah's school grading system, data from these two time periods were compared to determine which measure or measures each state used to publicly report school ratings, as well as to determine if each state increased or decreased the number of indicators required. Indicators were then organized into subcategories, as described below.

Since it is required for each state to have at least one indicator as the fifth indicator (measure(s) of school quality or student success), this study considers any indicator from the pre-ESSA period, as well as the fifth indicator(s) from approved current ESSA plans as indicators of school quality or student success, so long as the indicators are calculated into the matrix that is used for determining publicly reported school ratings and are not included in ESSA's first four required indicators. In a study from the Center for American Progress by K-12 education policy

analyst Samantha Batel, an overview of school classification indicators under ESSA was examined (Batel, 2017). Batel's study grouped indicators to clarify her findings. In considering the approach she took in her study, and in order to make sense of the less-than-specific ESSA requirements, it was determined that the indicators implemented by the various states clearly fit into five categories: Early Warning, Well-Rounded Education, Culture and Climate, Other Assessment Measures, and Locally Determined. Every state included at least two indicators from the five categories. The indicators implemented in state ESSA plans seemed to fit logically within the first four indicators categories. The fifth indicator category, Locally Determined Indicators, originated in the pre-ESSA plans from six states: Alabama, Connecticut, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, and Nevada. Utah also began giving schools the option to report on a locally determined indicator in the 2019-2020 school year. In Utah, these are referred to as Self-Reported Indicators, and although their progress was reported on each school's report card, they had no influence on the grade a school received. Therefore, this study assigned the school quality or student success indicators to one of the five categories below:

1. Early Warning Indicators (attendance or chronic absenteeism)
2. Well-Rounded Education (inclusion of fine or performing arts, physical education, world languages, computer science, health, library, science, and social studies)
3. Culture and Climate (school environment/climate, behavior or suspensions, class size, teacher quality, early intervention programs, and social-emotional learning)
4. Other Assessment Measures (gifted and talented programs, minimally proficient, students with disabilities, military or workforce readiness, transition or high school readiness, and test participation rates)

5. Locally Determined Indicators (These indicators may categorically fit into one of the first four indicator categories, but since they are "locally determined," they are designated into this unique indicator category.

The national comparison of state data from these two time periods was contrasted with Utah's data to help policy makers in Utah draw conclusions about Utah's focus regarding indicators and measures used to determine school grading.

Structural Holes

Two main patterns or potential "structural holes" are recognized from the research. First, even though the same ESSA guidelines are given to all states, state elementary and middle school accountability systems vary greatly in the complexity of their plans, the public reporting methods used, and in chosen indicators with accompanying weights ascribed to each indicator. Second, regarding the pre-ESSA and current-ESSA time periods, there was a fair amount of research confusion in distinguishing between past, current, and proposed elementary and middle school accountability systems on state web sites. State websites were in transition to conform to the new ESSA guidelines and were at different stages of implementation. There may be additional ongoing changes that could have implications of a holistic approach to school grading because some states are considering revising their ESSA plans (Botel, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2010; Utah State Board of Education, 2018). Even Utah has considered changing from the A-F school grading system to a data dashboard system. Representative Marie Poulson recently introduced HB0175 and on 12 February 2020, it passed the House but was rejected by the Senate (H.B. 175 Education Accountability Amendments, 2020). This is still a hot issue and changes are likely to be considered in the future.

In addition to the two identified main patterns or potential structural holes, one cannot dismiss the possibility of confirmatory bias, or what is referred to as the "halo effect" (Bhat, 2020, p. 7). The halo effect, a term coined by the psychologist Edward Thorndike, is a cognitive bias in one's impressions and considers the possibility that the researcher may have a potential bias towards the research topic (Nayak, 2020). While intentional effort was made to counter this by collecting factual data without interjecting opinions, it would be short-sighted to not consider this as a potential structural hole.

In addressing the two main structural holes in the research, it was decided that the most effective approach to meet the purposes of this study was to address the variation in the state plans by recognizing the indicators found on pre-ESSA state education web sites. This distinguishing information alone could prove to be valuable to elementary and middle school policy makers.

Summary

Implemented in this work are the methods that portray a descriptive study of archival data of grades K-8 school grading systems and indicators, as well as state level school grading systems. Data are collected and compared from right after NCLB, referred to as pre-ESSA with current state ESSA plans, referred to as current-ESSA. Special focus was given to identify and compare what is regarded as ESSA's 5th indicator. The results of this study will arm school policy makers with information from state ESSA plans from across the country that may help make a determination as to whether implemented indicators and measures represent holistic approaches in evaluating K-8 schools.

APPENDIX C

Consent/Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS

Memorandum

To: Darryl Denhalter
Department: EDLF
College: EDUC
From: Sandee Aina, MPA, IRB Administrator
Bob Ridge, PhD, IRB Chair
Date: September 24, 2018
IRB#: E18399
Title: *"Holistic Approaches to State School Grading Systems"*

Brigham Young University's IRB has approved the research study referenced in the subject heading as exempt level, category 4. The approval period is from **September 24, 2018 to September 23, 2019**. Please reference your assigned IRB identification number in any correspondence with the IRB. Continued approval is conditional upon your compliance with the following requirements:

1. Any modifications to the approved protocol must be submitted, reviewed, and approved by the IRB before modifications are incorporated in the study.
2. All recruiting tools must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to use.
3. In addition, serious adverse events must be reported to the IRB immediately, with a written report by the PI within 24 hours of the PI's becoming aware of the event. Serious adverse events are (1) death of a research participant; or (2) serious injury to a research participant.
4. All other non-serious unanticipated problems should be reported to the IRB within 2 weeks of the first awareness of the problem by the PI. Prompt reporting is important, as unanticipated problems often require some modification of study procedures, protocols, and/or informed consent processes. Such modifications require the review and approval of the IRB.
5. A few months before the expiration date, you will receive a continuing review form. There will be two reminders. Please complete the form in a timely manner to ensure that there is no lapse in the study approval.

IRB Secretary
A 285 ASB
Brigham Young University
(801)422-3606

APPENDIX D

Pre-ESSA Period Summary of Indicators

State	Differentiation Method	Indicators																								
		Early Warning Category	Well-Rounded Education Category									Culture and Climate Category							Other Assessments Category						Locally Determined Category	
		Attendance & Chronic Absenteeism	Science	Social Studies	Fine Art	Computer Science*	Physical Education*	World Language	Performing Art	Health*	Library*	Behavior or Suspension	School Quality Survey/Review	Educator Administrator Rotation	Social & Emotional Learning (SEL)	Class Size	Teacher Quality	Early Intervention (Pre-K)	Accelerated Learners	Transition or High School Readiness	Test Participation**	Students with Disabilities	Minimally Proficient	Military or Workforce Readiness	Misc. Academic	Misc. Non-Academic
Alabama	A-F Grading	x																x	x						x	
Alaska	Categorical Rating	x															x	x	x							
Arizona	A-F Grading																	x								
Arkansas	A-F Grading	x	x															x								
California	Data Dashboard	x										x						x	x							
Colorado	Data Dashboard	x																								
Connecticut	Data Dashboard		x																							x
Delaware	Data Dashboard	x	x	x	x							x	x	x	x	x	x									
Florida	A-F Grading		x	x															x							
Georgia	A-F Grading	x	x	x																					x	
Hawai'i	Data Dashboard	x	x																							
Idaho	Data Dashboard		x																						x	x
Illinois	Numerical Rating	x	x		x								x													x
Indiana	Data Dashboard	x																	x							
Iowa	Data Dashboard														x											
Kansas	Data Dashboard		x																							
Kentucky	Data Dashboard			x	x			x	x															x		
Louisiana	A-F Grading		x	x																						
Maine	A-F Grading		x											x												
Maryland	Categorical Rating		x																							
Massachusetts	Numerical Rating		x																							
Michigan	Categorical Rating		x	x																						
Minnesota	Data Dashboard		x	x																						
Mississippi	A-F Grading	x																			x					
Missouri	Data Dashboard		x																							
Montana	Data Dashboard											x									x					
Nebraska	Data Dashboard	x	x																							
Nevada	Star System																								x	
New Hampshire	Data Dashboard	x	x													x							x			
New Jersey	Data Dashboard	x	x									x				x	x									
New Mexico	A-F Grading	x											x						x		x		x			
New York	Data Dashboard	x	x	x								x					x									
North Carolina	A-F Grading	x	x									x					x			x						
North Dakota	Data Dashboard												x													
Ohio	A-F Grading		x																x			x	x			
Oklahoma	A-F Grading	x	x																							
Oregon	Numerical Rating		x																							
Pennsylvania	Numerical Rating	x																								

State	Differentiation Method	Indicators																									
		Early Warning Category	Well-Rounded Education Category										Culture and Climate Category							Other Assessments Category						Locally Determined Category	
		Attendance & Chronic Absences	Science	Social Studies	Fine Art	Computer Science*	Physical Education*	World Language	Performing Art	Health*	Library*	Behavior or Suspension	School Quality Survey/Review	Educator & Administrator Retention	Social & Emotional Learning (SEL)	Class Size	Teacher Quality	Early Intervention (Pre-K)	Accelerated Learners	Transition or High School Readiness	Test Participation**	Students with Disabilities	Minimally Proficient	Military or Workforce Readiness	Misc. Academic	Misc. Non-Academic
Rhode Island	Categorical Rating																										
South Carolina	Data Dashboard	x	x	x	x			x	x			x			x							x					
South Dakota	A-F Grading	x															x										
Tennessee	A-F Grading	x	x	x																				x			
Texas	A-F Grading	x	x																								
Utah	A-F Grading		x																								
Vermont	Data Dashboard	x																		x							
Virginia	Data Dashboard	x	x																								
Washington	Data Dashboard		x																								
West Virginia	A-F Grading	x										x			x				x								
Wisconsin	Numerical Rating	x																			x						
Wyoming	Categorical Rating																			x							
Washington D.C.	Numerical Rating	x																		x	x						
Pre-ESSA		28	48									28							26						7		
		28	30	10	4	0	0	2	2	0	0	8	4	2	4	3	5	2	10	4	5	2	3	2	4	3	

*Test participation, Students with Disabilities, Minimally Proficient, Physical Education, Health, Library, and Computer Science indicators were not recorded on pre-ESSA measures because they were not identified.
**Test Participation is a required ESSA measure of school performance in ESSA, but was not required during the pre-ESSA period.

APPENDIX E

Current-ESSA Period Summary of Indicators

State	Differentiation Method	Indicators																								
		Early Warning Category	Well-Rounded Education Category									Culture and Climate Category							Other Assessments Category						Locally Determined Category	
		Attendance & Chronic Absences	Science	Social Studies	Fine Art	Computer Science*	Physical Education*	World Language	Performing Art	Health*	Library*	Behavior or Suspension	School Quality Survey/Review	Educator & Administrator Retention	Social & Emotional Learning (SEL)	Class Size	Teacher Quality	Early Intervention (Pre-K)	Accelerated Learners	Transition or High School Readiness	Test Participation**	Students with Disabilities	Minimally Proficient	Military or Workforce Readiness	Misc. Academic	Misc. Non-Academic
Alabama	A-F Grading	x																			x					
Alaska	Categorical Rating	x																			x					
Arizona	A-F Grading	x																	x		x	x	x			
Arkansas	A-F Grading	x	x			x							x								x					
California	Data Dashboard	x										x														
Colorado	Categorical Rating	x	x																		x		x			
Connecticut	Numerical Rating	x	x		x		x													x	x					
Delaware	Categorical Rating	x	x	x																	x		x			
Florida	A-F Grading		x	x															x		x		x	x		
Georgia	Numerical Rating	x	x	x	x		x	x		x											x		x	x		
Hawai'i	Numerical Rating	x																			x					
Idaho	Data Dashboard												x								x		x			
Illinois	Categorical Rating	x	x		x				x				x					x			x					
Indiana	A-F Grading	x																			x					
Iowa	Categorical Rating												x		x						x					
Kansas	Categorical Rating																				x		x			
Kentucky	Star System	x	x	x	x			x	x	x		x	x						x	x	x		x			
Louisiana	A-F Grading		x	x																	x					
Maine	Categorical Rating	x																			x					
Maryland	Star System	x	x	x	x	x	x			x			x								x					
Massachusetts	Categorical Rating	x	x																		x					
Michigan	Numerical Rating	x			x		x		x		x										x					
Minnesota	Data Dashboard	x																			x					
Mississippi	A-F Grading		x	x																	x		x			
Missouri	Categorical Rating	x																			x					
Montana	Categorical Rating	x	x									x	x				x				x					
Nebraska	Categorical Rating	x	x										x				x				x		x	x		
Nevada	Star System	x	x										x						x	x	x					
New Hampshire	Data Dashboard	x																			x		x			
New Jersey	Numerical Rating	x																			x					
New Mexico	A-F Grading	x	x										x								x		x			
New York	Categorical Rating	x	x	x								x	x								x					
North Carolina	A-F Grading		x																		x					
North Dakota	Data Dashboard												x								x					
Ohio	A-F Grading	x	x	x															x		x					
Oklahoma	A-F Grading	x	x																		x					
Oregon	Categorical Rating	x																			x					
Pennsylvania	Data Dashboard	x	x																		x			x		

State	Differentiation Method	Indicators																									
		Early Warning Category	Well-Rounded Education Category										Culture and Climate Category							Other Assessments Category						Locally Determined Category	
		Attendance & Chronic Absences	Science	Social Studies	Fine Art	Computer Science*	Physical Education*	World Language	Performing Art	Health*	Library*	Behavior or Suspension	School Quality Survey/Review	Educator & Administrator Retention	Social & Emotional Learning (SEL)	Class Size	Teacher Quality	Early Intervention (Pre-K)	Accelerated Learners	Transition or High School Readiness	Test Participation**	Students with Disabilities	Minimally Proficient	Military or Workforce Readiness	Misc. Academic	Misc. Non-Academic
Rhode Island	Star System	x	x									x									x						
South Carolina	Numerical Rating		x	x									x								x						
South Dakota	Numerical Rating	x																			x						
Tennessee	A-F Grading	x	x									x	x								x			x			
Texas	A-F Grading		x	x																	x						
Utah	A-F Grading		x																		x		x				
Vermont	Categorical Rating		x				x										x				x						
Virginia	Categorical Rating	x																					x				
Washington	Numerical Rating	x											x								x						
West Virginia	Categorical Rating	x										x									x						
Wisconsin	Numerical Rating	x											x								x						
Wyoming	Numerical Rating												x								x		x				
Washington D.C.	Star System	x											x			x	x										
Current ESSA		38	60									32							79						0		
		38	27	11	6	2	5	2	3	3	1	7	18	0	1	1	4	1	5	3	48	1	17	5	0	0

*Test participation, Students with Disabilities, Minimally Proficient, Physical Education, Health, Library, and Computer Science indicators were not recorded on pre-ESSA measures because they were not identified.

**Test Participation is a required ESSA measure of school performance in ESSA, but was not required during the pre-ESSA period.

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