

ESSA Empowers States as ‘No Child’ Act is Left Behind

The highly unpopular No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 met its maker in 2015. After years of neglect, lawmakers on Capitol Hill poured red ink over many of NCLB’s broken mandates: performance targets, federal micro-management, teacher qualifications and corrective actions for underachieving schools have been overhauled in the reformed Every Student Succeeds Act.

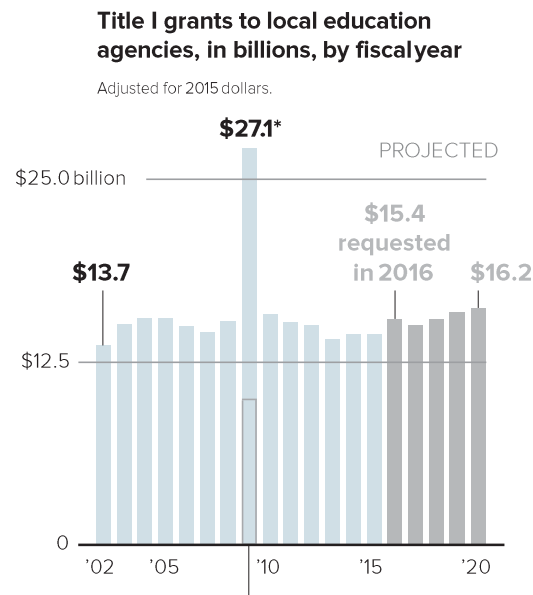
ESSA, signed by President Barack Obama on Dec. 10, 2015, still requires annual standardized testing in grades three through eight and once in high school, and for the release of data on how all students do on those tests — including “subgroups,” such as English-learners, students with disabilities, minorities and those in poverty. But states will ultimately decide how to weigh test scores, as most of the decision-making is shifted to the state and its local education agencies, while the federal government’s role is greatly diminished.

Highlights of the Every Student Succeeds Act

Few provisions of NCLB will carry over to ESSA unscathed. States that have adopted Common Core standards may stick with the program or they can create their own “challenging” academic standards, which would have to be approved by the U.S. Education Department. The secretary of Education, however, would be expressly prohibited from forcing or even incentivizing states to pick a particular set of college and career-ready academic standards.

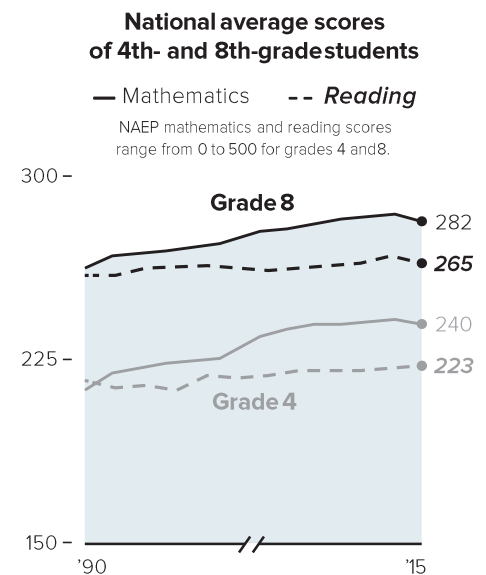
Federal funding

Under ESSA, Title I funding is intended for schools with a high percentage of children living in poverty. Schools can use funds to provide extra teachers, intervention programs, supplemental materials, technology or professional development. NCLB’s funding formula remains intact.



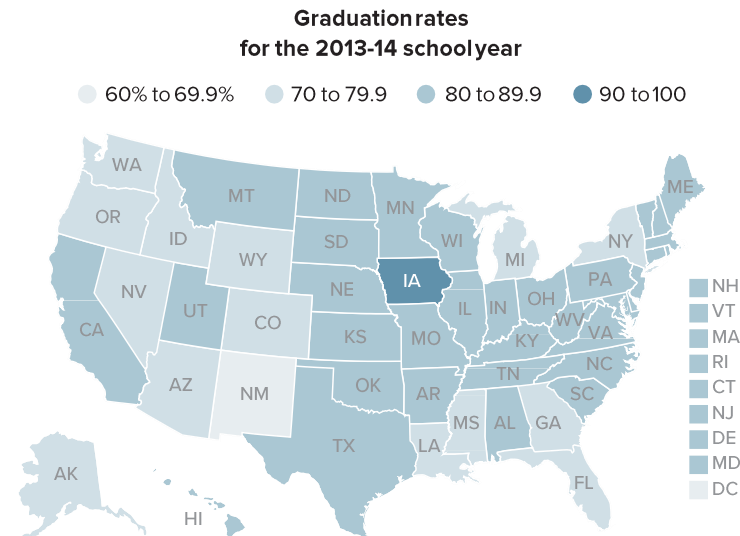
Student testing

ESSA allows school districts, with state permission, to use “nationally recognized” tests like the ACT or SAT for annually testing high school students and for holding high schools accountable for student learning and progress. States are required to test at least 95 percent of students annually. Up to seven states will be able to participate in an innovative assessment pilot, allowing them to experiment with new exams that look different than the traditional standardized test, such as New Hampshire’s pilot test.

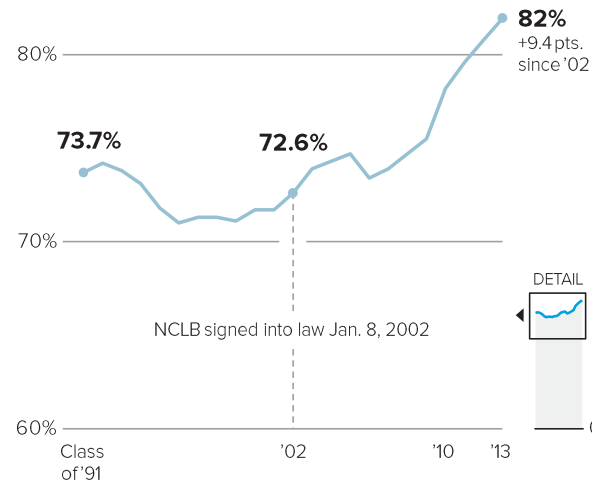


High school graduation rates

States would have to identify and intervene in high schools where the graduation rate is 67 percent or less.



Averaged freshman graduation rate for U.S. public schools, by graduating class

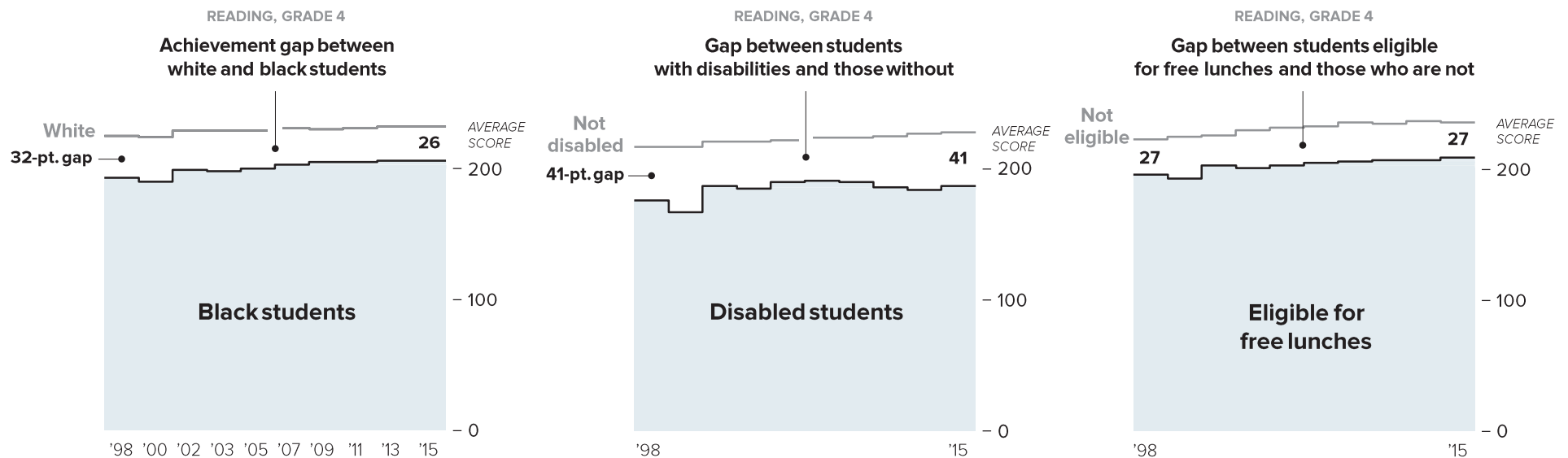


The averaged freshman graduation rate provides an estimate of the percentage of students who receive a regular diploma within four years of entering ninth grade. The rate uses aggregate student-enrollment data to estimate the size of an incoming freshman class and aggregate counts of the number of diplomas awarded four years later. Averaged freshman graduation rates in this table are based on reported totals of enrollment by grade and high school graduates, rather than on details reported by race/ethnicity.

Struggling subgroups

States will be responsible for setting their own goals for improvement, which would require them to collect data on multiple factors for all students.

ESSA maintains the NCLB mandate that states measure progress for each individual subgroup, such as by race or students with disabilities.



Adjusted cohort graduation rate of white and black public high school students in 2013–14

◀ SMALLEST RATE GAP

Rate gap:

Less than 5 points

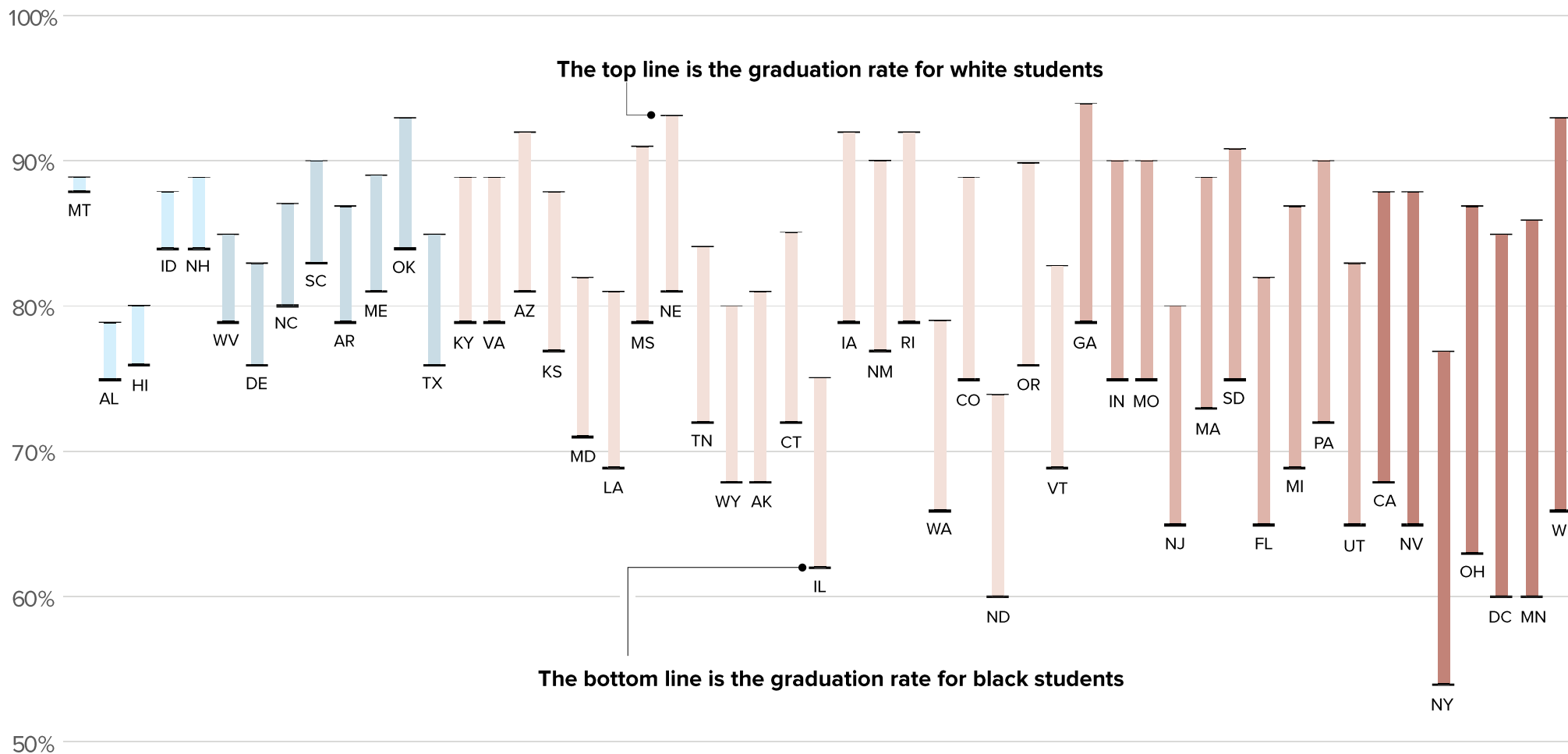
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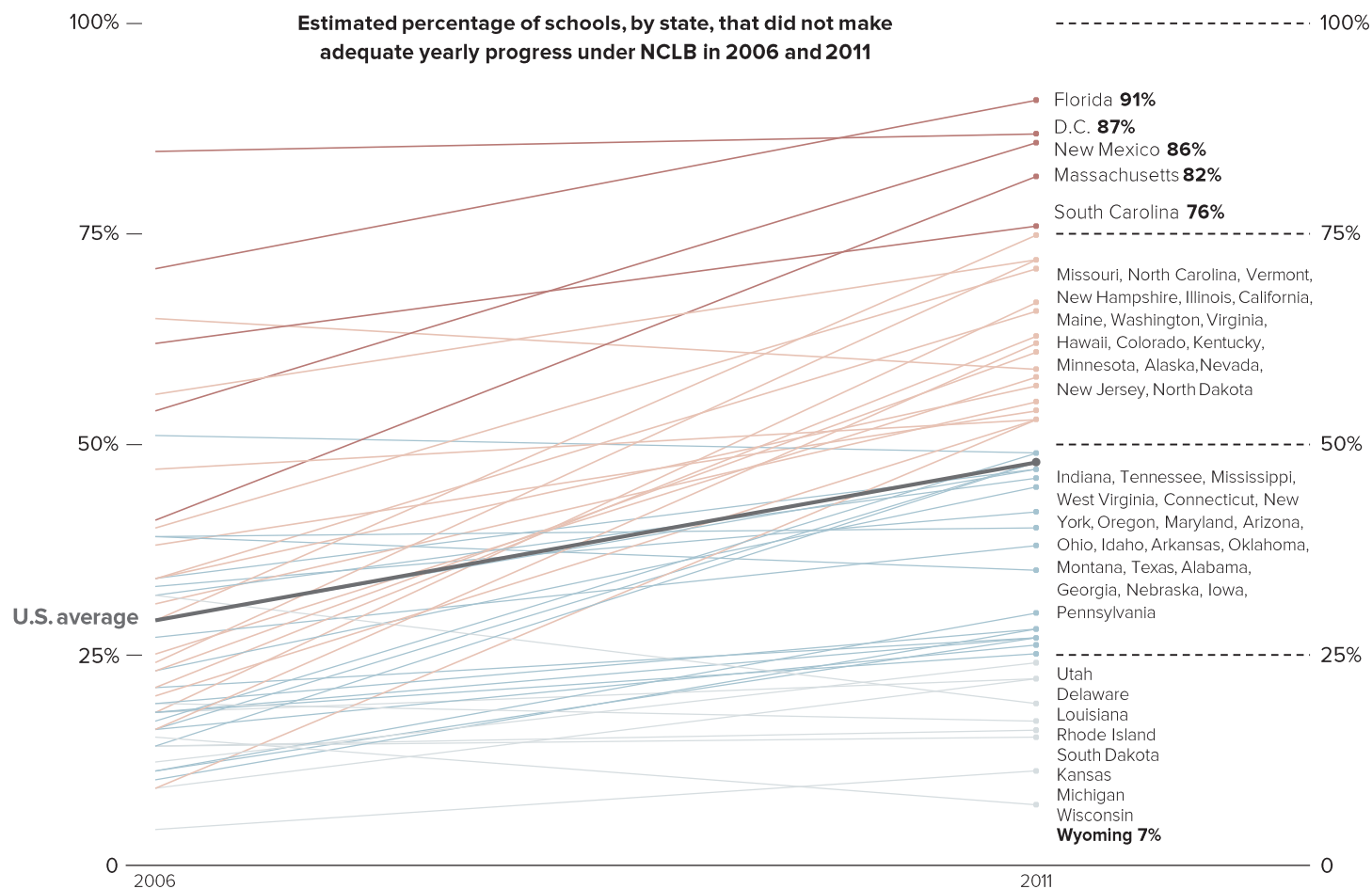
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GREATEST RATE GAP ▶



Interventions

ESSA requires states to identify and work with the bottom 5 percent of its schools. These schools would have to be identified at least once every three years. States and districts can intervene in underperforming schools by whatever “evidence-based” method they choose.



Major Provisions in No Child Left Behind Not in ESSA



Performance targets

Every Student Succeeds ends NCLB's requirement that all students be 100 percent-proficient, or grade level, in math and English by 2014. No state ever met this benchmark, which led to the Obama administration's issuance of conditional waivers to states so that they could circumvent this mandate.



Adequate yearly progress

The "adequate yearly progress" requirement that measures whether Title I-funded schools are meeting proficiency goals or not, and the sanctions doled out to schools if they didn't achieve these goals, are erased from the books. Under ESSA, the AYP will be replaced by state-determined systems.



Waivers

By 2011, many schools did not meet NCLB's achievement targets. The Obama administration awarded waivers that exempted states from many of the law's mandates. In exchange for a waiver, states were required to adopt more rigorous academic standards and exams, in addition to tying student test scores to teacher evaluations, among other changes. ESSA gets rid of waivers from NCLB and grants states a lot of flexibility on teacher evaluations.



Teacher qualifications

NCLB required teachers to be "highly qualified teachers" who met certain requirements. ESSA does away with the term "highly qualified teachers" and federal teacher standards. Instead, each state will determine its own qualification standards for its teachers.



Academic standards

ESSA quells the political controversy surrounding the federal endorsement of academic standards by prohibiting federal officials, including the secretary of Education, from requiring, endorsing, or providing incentives for the adoption of any specific set of standards, including Common Core.



Underperforming schools

NCLB imposed specific, corrective actions upon schools that were not making adequate progress in student achievement. ESSA prohibits the federal government from requiring specific approaches to school improvement. Instead, states must select evidence-based interventions for schools performing in the lowest 5 percent.