

Student Engagement Survey for ESSA: Federal Requirements Crosswalk

Background on ESSA

Statewide accountability systems are designed to report school performance on an annual basis. These federally required systems are meant to articulate goals for all students, primarily focused on increasing academic achievement and growth. Accountability should provide robust information that celebrates school success and identifies areas in greatest need of improvement. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) outlines federal requirements for the adoption of state accountability systems. Under ESSA, states must include the following accountability indicators:

- Academic Achievement, measured by proficiency on state assessments
- An Additional Academic Indicator for grades 3-8 (e.g. Growth)
- Progress of English Learners on ELP assessments
- Cohort Graduation Rates (high schools only)

At least one indicator of school quality or student success (SQSS): *“the State may include measures of— (III) student engagement; (IV) educator engagement; (V) student access to and completion of advanced coursework; (VI) postsecondary readiness; (VII) school climate and safety; and (VIII) any other indicator the State chooses that meets the requirements of this clause”*

Additionally, ESSA requires that a state-selected indicator of school quality or student success must: **1) allow for meaningful differentiation, 2) be valid and reliable, 3) have consistency within a grade span, 4) be comparable and applicable statewide, and 5) be measured and reported annually with subgroup disaggregation.**

Background on the Cognia Student Engagement Survey (SES)

The Cognia Student Engagement Survey (SES) was developed based on a review of extensive research into authentic student engagement, self-efficacy, and motivation. For the purposes of survey development, student engagement was defined as, “the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught.” Research has shown that student engagement affects a variety of outcomes including student achievement. Students who are fully engaged in school are significantly more likely to attend college, significantly more likely to display pro-social behavior, regularly attend school, and have a higher-level academic success ¹. Disengagement has been linked to psychological discouragement, disruptive, anti-social and/or off-task behaviors, tardiness and absenteeism. Further, student engagement may be directly affected by the actions taken by the school or in the classroom.

Cognia SES instruments were developed to be age-appropriate, yielding three survey forms: elementary (grades 3-5), middle (grades 6-8), and high (grades 9-12). Each form is composed of 21 items measuring student engagement quality levels:

- in three distinct domains: Behavioral, Cognitive, and Emotional;
- across three quality levels: Committed, Compliant, and Disengaged;
- and, further reported within each quality level as “Invested” or “Immersed” (Committed), “Strategic” or “Ritual” (Compliant), and “Retreatism” or “Rebellion” (Disengaged).

By measuring three domains of engagement at up to six levels of engagement quality, the instruments provide meaningful, nuanced data to schools seeking to better understand the degree of student engagement within their student body. Survey results provide useful insights learned from student responses and allow schools and districts the opportunity to understand student engagement in greater detail. These insights enable schools, districts, and states to engage in more collaborative conversations with institution stakeholders to better respond to the needs of their students.

Federal Requirement #1- Allows for Meaningful Differentiation

The SQSS indicator must be measured in a manner that highlights variability among schools. Further, it must be supported by evidence of the technical quality of the underlying scale/measure and evidence that the indicator provides sufficient spread across a range of outcomes.

Student responses to items on the SES reflect their quality of engagement in their learning process. These item responses are used to determine engagement level and type by domain, which are aggregated and reported at the school-level. Reporting and interpretation of the SES is designed to be at the school-level and provide insight into the overall levels that students are Committed, Compliant, or Disengaged across each domain. Therefore, variability among school profiles of engagement is reflective of varying degrees of engagement expressed by students.

Each report provided to the state includes the school's overall percentage of students in each level by domain. Additionally, data is provided based on student subgroup to allow for ESSA compliance. While some states have elected to report performance for the purposes of differentiation on the SES by percentage of committed students across all domains, states may exercise flexibility in overall rating determinations to remain consistent with strategic goals and theory of action.

Federal Requirement #2- Valid and Reliable

The indicator must provide valid, consistent inferences across school performance. The indicator must be fair and within the school's purview to address. The indicator must be supported by evidence that it will provide reliable distinctions among schools and not be subject to bias based on school type, student demographics, and other factors outside of the school's control.

As previously mentioned, the Cognia SES underwent a rigorous development, pilot and field test process to ensure items were clearly understandable to students and could differentiate between and among students from a psychometric standpoint. A field study of 4,571 students across five states conducted in the fall of 2020 demonstrated that the instrument and individual items functioned as intended. Data from the field study were used to examine the validity and reliability of the three instrument versions (elementary, middle, and high). Evidence for reliability has been provided with strong values for Cronbach's alpha in middle and high school and moderate in elementary school. Evidence for the validity of the underlying construct has been demonstrated through application of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Evaluation of the theoretical model, or construct, against the empirical model provided by the field study data revealed "good fit", suggesting that the instrument measures what was intended, i.e., student engagement. Tested groups included free/reduced lunch eligible, male/female, Hispanic, Black, Asian, and Multi-Racial. Analysis of the survey instruments is ongoing, to ensure quality and usefulness.

The summary of a 2015 AIR research report states, "Student survey instruments can provide valuable insight into the teaching and learning environment of a classroom when used as one of multiple measures of educator



effectiveness. Students have the “deepest, broadest, and most veridical perception of their teacher,” and as such, “student survey instruments can be a valuable component when designing a comprehensive teacher evaluation system.” In other words, research confirms that students are able to provide valid and reliable opinions and perceptions honestly and accurately². Students are honest in responding to items that are based on their perceptions of themselves, and the data can tell us how committed and invested they are, as well as point to underlying issues about what is making some students lose traction and interest in their own learning.

Federal Requirement #3- Consistent Within Grade Span

While a state may elect to use different SQSS indicators across grade bands (3-5, 6-8, 9-12), within a given grade band the SQSS indicator must be consistently applied. The selected indicator(s) must remain coherent and consistent with the state’s theory of action and strategic goals.

The Cognia SES is available in three grade-span appropriate forms, elementary (grades 3-5), middle (grades 6-8), and high (grades 9-12). A Lexile analysis was conducted for each of the three forms to ensure the language used in each was appropriate for the age of the respondent. All three survey forms measure the same underlying concepts, providing valuable information to stakeholders seeking information on how students are engaging within their schools and opportunities to encourage students to take charge of their learning.

Federal Requirement #4- Comparable and Applicable Statewide

The indicator must support the same interpretations and uses across all schools. This includes supporting subgroup disaggregation, overall performance in at least three performance levels, and meaningful differentiation.

As previously outlined, the Cognia SES has three forms to remain age-appropriate for respondents. Within each domain on these survey forms, student engagement is categorized according to three levels and six types, described previously. These categories, and resulting interpretations, are consistently applied across survey forms for every school administering the Cognia SES. This allows stakeholders to use the results in a consistent manner across school-types to support and improve practices related to student engagement. The Cognia SES was designed to identify trends and paint a picture of school learning environments. As such, it may be applied more equitably than other measures heavily influenced by geographic location, transportation availability, economic resources, etc.

Federal Requirement #5- Measured and Reported Annually with Subgroup Disaggregation

The indicator must be reported annually on the school’s state-issued report card. Additionally, indicator performance must be disaggregated and publicly accessible for all subgroups meeting minimum n-size. ESSA defined subgroups include economically disadvantaged students, students from each major racial or ethnic group, English learners, and students with disabilities.

The Cognia SES uses student rostering to ensure appropriate data collection for ESSA-required reporting. Each survey administered is tied to the student’s unique, state-assigned student ID number. This identifier allows student survey results to be linked to his/her reported demographics. Although the Cognia SES is not designed for student-level score reporting, by using student identifiers, responses may be disaggregated based on



demographics as required under ESSA. Surveys are administered annually based on state selected administration windows to ensure data may be reported on the state report cards.

References

- ¹ Appleton, J. J., Christenson, S. L., & Furlong, M. J. (2008). Student engagement with school: Critical conceptual and methodological issues of the construct. *Psychology in the Schools*, 45, 369 – 386. doi: 10.1002/pits.20303
- Fredricks, J.A., Blumenfeld, P.C., & Paris, A.H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 74, 59–109.
- Hart, S., Stewart, K., & Jimerson, S. (2011). The student engagement in schools questionnaire (SESQ) and the teacher engagement report form-new (TERF-N): Examining the preliminary evidence. *Contemporary School Psychology*, 15, 67–79. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ934707.pdf>
- Jimerson, S., Campos, E., & Greif, J. (2003). Towards an understanding of definitions and measures of school engagement and related terms. *California School Psychologist*, 8, 7 – 28.
- Kortering, L, & Braziel, P. (2008). Engaging youth in school and learning: The emerging key to school success and completion. *Psychology in the Schools*, 45, 461 – 465. doi: 10.1002/pits.20309.
- Stewart E. (2008). School structural characteristics, student effort, peer associations, and parental involvement: The influence of school- and individual-level factors on academic achievement. *Education and Urban Society*. 2008;40:179–204.
- Walker, C. O., Greene, B. A., & Mansell, R. A. (2006). Identification with academics, intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, and self-efficacy as predictors of cognitive engagement. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 16(1), 1-12.
- Wang, M. & Degol, J. (2014). Staying Engaged: Knowledge and research needs in student engagement. *Child Dev Perspect*. 2014 Sep; 8(3): 137-143
- Wang, M. & Eccles, J. (2012). Adolescent behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement trajectories in school and their differential relations to educational success. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*. 2012a;22:31–39.
- ² Follman, J. (1992). Secondary school students’ ratings of teacher effectiveness. *The High School Journal*, 75(3), 168–178.

