

Report cards shift focus

New system puts emphasis on growth, graduation

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When the 2018 Illinois School Report Cards are released Oct. 31, parents and educators can expect to see significant changes to the way schools are measured with the switch to a new statewide accountability and support system.

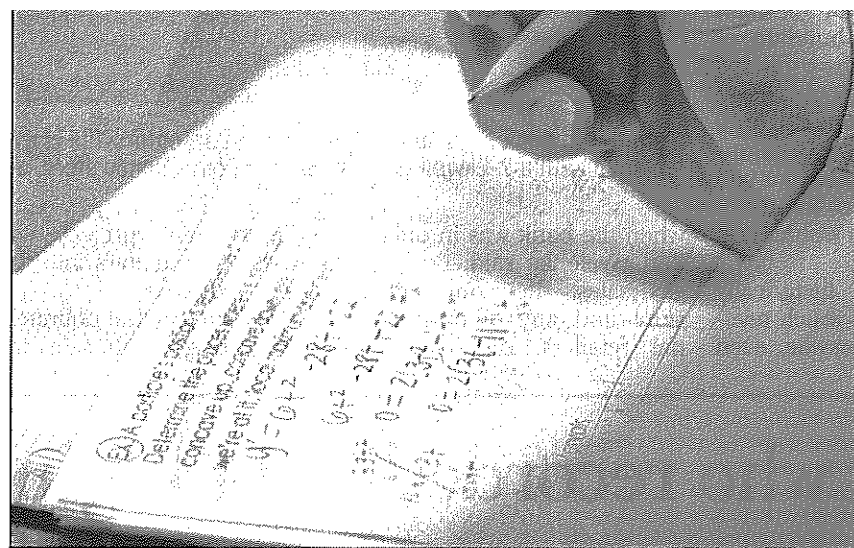
The new measure, the Every Student Succeeds Act, gives more weight to student growth and graduation rates, which accounts for 50 percent of how schools are evaluated. It shifts the focus away from standardized test scores.

Signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2015, it replaces the federal No Child Left Behind Act that served as a benchmark for 14 years.

That law drew considerable criticism for its emphasis on test scores, its labeling of some school districts as "failing" and what some saw as its punitive nature for schools not making the grade.

School quality now will be measured through multiple indicators of student success — standardized tests, alternative assessments, academic growth, English language proficiency, science scores, fine arts participation, success on college entrance tests and graduation rates, as well as factors such as chronic absenteeism and school climate surveys.

School climate surveys are meant to measure student,



school report cards coming out Oct. 31 will look quite different from those in previous years. The state has switched to a new accountability system.

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10 indicators of student success under ESSA

Preschool through eighth grade

Academic performance/growth

- English language arts proficiency
- Math proficiency
- Academic growth (accounts for 50 percent of school's evaluation)
- English learner progress
- Science proficiency

School quality/student success

- Chronic absenteeism
- Climate survey

- Preschool through second grade: Chronic absenteeism, dual language programs, third-grade literacy grades and participation in enrichment and acceleration

- Third through eighth grade: Fifth-grade math grades, middle school success (grades and discipline), participation in enrichment and acceleration

- Fine arts

High school

Academic performance/growth

- English language arts proficiency

- Math proficiency
- Graduation rate (accounts for 50 percent of school's evaluation)
- English learner progress
- Science proficiency

School quality/student success

- Chronic absenteeism
- Ninth-graders on track to graduate
- Climate survey
- College and career readiness
- Fine arts

Source: Illinois State Board of Education

parent and staff perceptions of teachers, school safety, leadership and issues such as bullying.

Schools will be designated based on 10 indicators as being exemplary, commendable, underperforming or lowest-performing, with funding and support provided to schools struggling the most.

"For the schools that are designated as low-performing and underperforming ... the state has set aside dollars that is going to help that school to choose some external expert, some system of support that can help move the needle within that school," said Tony Sanders, chief executive officer of Elgin Area School District U-46, the state's second-largest district serving more than 39,000 students.

"There is no financial

penalty to any school or school district, if they don't meet these benchmarks."

Sanders said being designated as a low- or underperforming school doesn't necessarily carry the same stigma as "failing" under the previous law. Yet, these labels themselves don't paint a complete picture of a school's performance, he added.

"We have to start telling our story," Sanders said. "There is more to our schools than one designation. This is not going to make or break a school. It's the community that does that."

Some of the indicators by which schools are to be measured will be phased in over the next few years to allow for statewide collection and consistency of data, said Jackie Matthews, spokeswoman for the Illinois State Board of Education.

For instance, how proficient students are on science subjects won't factor into a school's designation this year and will be included in next year's report card.

School climate and college and career readiness also are not being evaluated this year for the overall designation.

"Not every district was using the same climate survey," said Matthews adding, each school's survey results will be considered starting in 2019-20.

This is the first year the state is collecting data on college and career readiness.

Other measures of student performance in preschool through eighth grades, including participation in dual language, enrichment and acceleration programs, and fine arts also won't be represented in this year's designation for schools.