



Accreditation

State school accreditation policies

Education Commission of the States

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States moving from accreditation to accountability

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Accreditation policies vary widely among the states. Since ECS last reviewed public school accreditation policies in 1998, a number of states have seen their legislatures take a stronger role in accountability—resulting in a move from state-administered accreditation systems to outcomes-focused state accountability programs. Even in states maintaining accreditation programs, accreditation is often a component of the larger accountability system that evaluates school, district and state educational performance on a number of indicators.

What are the key differences between accountability and accreditation?

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Want to know more about state school accountability systems?

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Examples of the different approaches states take:

- In **Alaska, Kansas, and South Carolina**, accreditation status is one of the performance measures included on school report cards.
- In **Mississippi, Missouri and Virginia**, performance measures roll up to an overall rating used to determine a school or district's accreditation status.
- Six states, such as **Michigan and Utah**, “outsource” their accreditation process to a regional or national accrediting organization.

Depending on the state, accreditation may be implemented by a state agency or an independent external accrediting body. A few states, including **South Carolina and New Mexico**, allow schools and districts to choose between the state's accreditation system and an external accrediting process. States may apply sanctions to schools or school districts that fall below predetermined standards. But prior to state legislatures taking a stronger role in accountability, school performance was not as transparent to the public nor typically sanctioned in meaningful or timely ways.

Key Takeaways

- 26 states have some type of accreditation program; all 50 have some form of accountability.
- At least 11 states have folded the accreditation process into their accountability systems: **Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia and Wyoming.**
- Six states have discontinued the use of state accreditation processes since 1998: **Alabama, Delaware, Louisiana, Maryland, Rhode Island and Washington.**
- Six states – **Alaska, Connecticut, Idaho, Michigan, North Dakota and Utah** – use regional or national accrediting agencies, such as the New England Association of Colleges and Schools.

Regional and national accrediting bodies are non-profit, non-governmental agencies and are recognized as reliable authorities on the quality of education offered by a school. Even in states with a state-administered accreditation system, many schools choose to retain both state and regional or national accreditation. This is important for secondary schools, as many postsecondary institutions require that students graduate from a high school accredited by a regional or national accrediting organization.

Key differences between accountability and accreditation

Accreditation systems:

- ✓ Used by 26 states in some form
- ✓ Certify that schools meet specific operations, programs and sometimes performance standards
- ✓ Tend to include input such as student-teacher ratios and physical classroom size
- ✓ Typically focus on individual schools, although some states accredit districts
- ✓ Typically crafted and overseen by state boards of education

Accountability systems:

- ✓ Used by all states in some form
- ✓ Include academic standards, assessments, rewards and sanctions
- ✓ Typically focus on both schools and districts
- ✓ Typically driven by state legislatures

Accreditation and the 50 states

State	State Accredits?	Summary	Citation
AL	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	Alabama State Board of Education Resolution, March 13, 2008
AK	Yes	The state board of education has the authority to grant accreditation, and AdvancED Northwest provides all school accreditation.	ALASKA STAT. § 14.07.020(a)(6); ALASKA ADMIN. CODE tit. 4, § 04.300
AZ	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
AR	Yes	The state department of education is responsible for developing comprehensive accreditation standards for schools and school districts. The standards include graduation requirements and student performance, among other measures.	ARK. CODE ANN. § 6-11-105, 6-15-202, 6-15-207; ARK. ADMIN. CODE 005.15.2-1.0 through 005.15.2-27.0
CA	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A

State	State Accredits?	Summary	Citation
CO	Yes	The state board of education develops a statewide school district accreditation program as part of the statewide education accountability system. School districts accredit their schools using the state’s accreditation ratings or a local accreditation process that aligns with the state’s criteria.	COLO. REV. STAT. § 22-11-207, § 22-11-210; 1 COLO. CODE REGS. § 301
CT	Yes	All school accreditation is done through the New England Association of Colleges and Schools.	CONN. GEN. STAT. § 10-239j
DE	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
FL	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
GA	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
HI	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
ID	Yes	Accreditation is required for secondary schools (grades 9-12) but is voluntary for schools with grades K-8. Accreditation is done by the Northwest Accreditation Commission.	IDAHO CODE § 33-1612 and IDAPA 8.02.02.140
IL	Yes	Schools must comply with operational, student performance and improvement standards, and schools and districts receive a recognition status based on compliance. These standards include components common in many accreditation systems.	105 ILL. COMP. STAT. 5/2-3.25 through 5/2-3.25o; ILL ADMIN. CODE tit. 23, § 1.10 and 1.20
IN	Yes	Performance-based accreditation is part of the state’s accountability system, and the state board of education establishes the accreditation system. Schools may be accredited under the state system or by a board-approved national or regional accrediting organization.	IND. CODE § 20-31-4, § 20-31-5, § 20-31-8; IND. ADMIN. CODE tit. 511, r. 6.1
IA	Yes	The state board of education establishes accreditation standards for schools and school districts; as part of the process, schools and districts must also meet the state board’s accountability requirements.	IOWA CODE § 256.11, 256.7; IOWA ADMIN. CODE r. 281.12.1 through 281.12.10
KS	Yes	The state board of education is responsible for establishing a “school performance accreditation system” based on performance and quality criteria and performance improvement.	KAN. STAT. ANN. § 72-6439; KAN. ADMIN. REGS. 9-31-31 through 91-31-42
KY	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
LA	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
ME	Yes	The state board of education creates rules on the approval and accreditation of public schools. Secondary schools may pursue outside accreditation, but only with department approval.	ME. REV STAT. ANN. tit. 20A, § 405(3)(E); CODE ME. R. § 05-071 Ch. 138

State	State Accredits?	Summary	Citation
MD	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
MA	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
MI	Yes	The department of education develops accreditation standards, which include student performance on statewide assessments. AdvancED accredits schools in Michigan, and school boards report their accreditation status to the superintendent of schools.	MICH. COMP. LAWS § 380.1280; Michigan Department of Education website
MN	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
MS	Yes	The state board of education and the commission on school accreditation establish and implement a performance-based accreditation system and accountability system for public schools and schools districts.	MISS. CODE ANN. § 37.17.1 through § 37.17.13; MISS. REG. 7-3:400
MO	Yes	The state board of education classifies and accredits public schools as part of the performance-based Missouri School Improvement System. Annual report cards for each school and school district include the district accreditation rating and student achievement results from the state assessment system.	MO. REV. STAT. § 161.092(9), 160.518, 160.522; MO. CODE REGS. ANN. tit. 5, § 20-100.105, 20-100.170, 20-200.110, 20-200.210
MT	Yes	The board of public education, with recommendation of the superintendent of public instruction, adopts standards of accreditation for all schools. The accreditation standards include student performance standards. School districts and schools must develop and implement continuous school improvement plans.	MONT. CODE ANN. § 20-7-101 and § 20-7-102; MONT. ADMIN. R. 10.55.601 through 10.55.606
NE	Yes	Schools must meet quality and performance-based approval or accreditation standards established by the state board of education. Accreditation standards require school districts to align with the board's core curriculum standard.	NEB. REV. STAT. § 79-703; NEB. ADMIN. CODE tit. 92 Ch. 10
NV	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
NH	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
NJ	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
NM	Yes	The state board of education accredits schools and districts as part of the statewide accountability program, which includes local and statewide student performance indicators. Schools may be accredited by the state or by regional accrediting associations.	N.M. STAT. ANN. § 22-2-2(F), § 22-2-2.1; N.M. ADMIN. CODE tit. 6, § 29.1

State	State Accredits?	Summary	Citation
NY	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
NC	Yes	Upon the request of local boards of education, the state board of education conducts an accreditation process with rigorous academic standards for secondary schools. Local boards of education must pay for the process.	N.C. GEN. STAT. § 115C-12.9(c), §115C-12.39; N.C. ADMIN. CODE tit. 16, r. 6G.0201 and 6G.0203
ND	Yes	Standards for accreditation must include measures of student achievement and improvement. The Department of Public Instruction uses AdvancED for accreditation. School districts must submit an annual compliance report for each school and implement an education improvement process.	N.D. CENT. CODE § 15.1-02-11, § 15.1-06-06; N.D. ADMIN. CODE § 67-19; Memo from State Superintendent, May 24, 2013
OH	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
OK	Yes	The state board of education is responsible for establishing accreditation rules. These rules must equal or exceed the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools accreditation standards and have an “academic results oriented approach.”	OKLA. STAT. tit. 70 §3-104(7), § 3-104.4; OKLA. ADMIN. CODE § 210:35
OR	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
PA	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
RI	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
SC	Yes	To receive accreditation, school districts must meet a minimum educational program approved by the state board of education. Schools may use the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools accreditation system for state accreditation renewal if it includes certain components.	S.C. CODE ANN. § 59-141-10(B)(2), 59-20-60, 59-18-710; 43 S.C. CODE ANN. REGS. 300, 261(A)(6)
SD	Yes	The department of education accredits schools in 5-year cycles and schools cannot substitute external accreditation. The accreditation process is performance-based and includes a review of each school’s required improvement plan.	S.D. CODIFIED LAWS § 13-3-47; S.D. ADMIN. R. 24:43
TN	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
TX	Yes	Accreditation is part of the accountability system and is partly based on student performance. The commissioner of education assigns school districts an accreditation status yearly. Districts and schools also receive an academic accountability rating.	TEX EDUC. CODE ANN. § 39.051 through 39.058, and § 39.102 through 39.117; 19 TEX ADMIN. CODE 97.1051 through 97.1073

State	State Accredits?	Summary	Citation
UT	Yes	The Utah State Office of Education facilitates accreditation of public schools by AdvancED Northwest. Accreditation, which is required for secondary schools and optional for middle and elementary schools, occurs every five years and must include Utah-specific requirements.	UTAH CODE ANN. § 53A-1-402(1)(c)(i); UTAH ADMIN. CODE R277-410
VT	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
VA	Yes	State board of education accredits schools, including “public virtual schools.” Accreditation standards include, among other factors, student performance and graduation rates and requirements. The Virginia Incentive of Performance program awards fully accredited schools that make progress in advanced proficiency levels.	VA. CODE ANN. § 22.1-19, § 22.1-253.13:3, 22.1-253.13:9; 8 VA. ADMIN CODE § 20-131-5 through 20-131-360
WA	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
WV	Yes	The state accountability system includes a performance-based accreditation system by the department of education. Schools receive an A-F grade based on student performance, while a school system’s status is based on their schools’ performance and improvement. Accreditation includes various performance measures and school performance audit results. Schools must complete a yearly report to determine compliance with process standards and receive periodic monitoring visits.	W. VA. CODE § 18-1-4, 18-2E-5, 18-2-6; W. VA. CODE ST. R. § 126-13-1 through 12-13-19
WI	No	The state has an education accountability system that does not include a formal accreditation process.	N/A
WY	Yes	The state board of education accredits school districts. The accreditation program is performance-based and includes the state accountability and assessment programs.	WYO. STAT. ANN. § 21-2-304(a)(ii), 21-2-204; WY Rules and Regulations EDU GEN Ch. 6

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