

Your Question:

You asked for information on states that have developed accountability systems specifically for alternative schools, including details on accountability measures and types of schools identified.

Our Response:

While [state definitions of alternative education](#) vary, alternative education programs generally offer students who are at risk of school failure in traditional school settings an opportunity to attend school in a new setting. Alternative schools vary in their student population, structure, setting and offerings. Because of these variations, it is challenging to design a system to hold these schools accountable while providing the flexibilities necessary to serve unique populations of students.

Unfortunately, many alternative schools have low-graduation rates. While only [6 percent of high schools](#) in the U.S. were classified as ‘alternative schools’ in 2017, they accounted for 30 percent of all low-graduation rate high schools. These statistics reinforce the need for states to hold alternative schools accountable for student success and the passage of ESSA has provided a forum for reinvigorating discussions around accountability. Below, we have gathered information on alternative school accountability systems and measures in Colorado, Texas and North Carolina, details on proposed systems in ESSA plans and further resources for your reference.

Alternative School Accountability Systems

To capture the unique nature of alternative schools, some states have developed nuanced accountability systems to ensure alternative schools are held to a high standard while reflecting the specialized ways they serve their students.

Colorado

In Colorado, schools that serve primarily high-risk students are called [Alternative Education Campuses](#). Districts may apply to the Colorado Department of Education for designation as an AEC if they meet [certain statutory requirements](#). Since 2011, the [school performance framework for AECs](#) has been different from traditional high schools and districts. There are a few differences between accountability for AECs and accountability for traditional high schools:

- 1) Measures of student engagement are included in the AEC framework instead of a growth gaps measure.
- 2) Performance domains are weighted differently.
- 3) And, AECs have the option to select from an additional set of optional measures.

This graphic from the Colorado Department of Education outlines the AEC accountability system:

AEC Accountability

Alternative Education Campuses receive a School Performance Framework annually, similar to traditional schools. The main exception is AECs are measured on Student Engagement measure, rather than Growth Gaps.

Performance Indicator	Weight		State-Required Measures and Metrics	Optional Measures and Metrics
	E/MS	HS		
Academic Achievement	20%	15%	1. CMAS/PARCC % of students proficient in Reading, Math, Writing, Science	NWEA MAP, Scantron, Acuity, Galileo, Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT), Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE), and/or Accuplacer
Academic Growth	50%	35%	1. CMAS/PARCC median growth percentiles in Reading, Math, Writing, and ACCESS (English language proficiency)	NWEA MAP, Scantron, Acuity, Galileo, Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT), Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE), ACCESS and/or Accuplacer
Student Engagement	30%	20%	1. Attendance rate 2. Truancy rate	1. Student Re-engagement, 2. Returning students, 3. Socio-Emotional or Psychological Adjustment
Postsecondary & Workforce Readiness	N/A	30%	1. Completion rate (best of 4, 5, 6, or 7 year rate) 2. Dropout rate 3. Colorado ACT score (average)	1. Credit/course completion, 2. Workforce Readiness, 3. Post-Completion Success, 4. Successful transition (for non-degree granting schools only), 5. Graduation rate

According to Colorado’s ESSA plan, AECs will first be evaluated according to the same measures and indicators as all other schools. If the general system fails to differentiate among AECs, as it has in the past, the state will implement a separate system to aid in differentiation.

Texas

Alternative performance measures for campuses serving at-risk students were first implemented in Texas in 1995. [Alternative Education Accountability](#) (AEA) Campuses are defined as those that serve students at risk of drop-out and provide accelerated instructional services to those students. The performance results of students at registered AECs are included in the district’s performance and used in determining the district’s accountability rating.

The primary difference between traditional school accountability and AEA is the [index 4 score](#). For traditional schools, index 4 is based on four components: STAAR scores, graduation rate, graduation diploma plan and college/career readiness. For AEA schools, index 4 is based on two components: STAAR scores and 4, 5 and 6-year rates for graduates, continuing students, and GED recipients (or annual drop-out rate if graduation rate is not available).

North Carolina

The [Alternative Schools’ Accountability Model](#) (ASAM) was developed to provide information on alternative schools in place of a school performance grade. Schools are placed into one of four types’ of alternative schools and may select from the following [options for accountability](#), depending on their category of identification:

- 1) Participation in the School Performance Grades (traditional school accountability system).
- 2) Returning data/results back to students’ base schools and receiving no designation.
- 3) Participation in the Alternative Schools’ Progress Model (ASPM).
- 4) Or, proposing its own alternative accountability model for approval by the state board of education.

Alternative Education Accountability in ESSA Plans

Many states have also sought to shift their systems under ESSA. According to an [analysis conducted by the American Youth Policy Forum](#), states have approached alternative school accountability in their ESSA plans in a number of ways:

- Inclusion of measures relevant to alternative settings in single ESSA accountability system.
 - **Massachusetts** included tailored accountability measures that are particularly relevant to alternative settings but still apply to all schools, including an ‘extended engagement rate.’
- Identification of alternative schools separate from traditional schools in single ESSA accountability system.
 - **Idaho** has one accountability system, and plans to identify the bottom 5 percent of traditional schools and the bottom 5 percent of alternative schools separately for purposes of improvement.
- Single ESSA accountability system and a system for differentiating alternative schools outside of an ESSA plan.
 - **Arkansas** and **Arizona** have distinct models for alternative schools and those systems will not affect how alternative schools are identified under ESSA.
- Close monitoring and evaluation of alternative schools and programs.
 - **Kentucky** has mostly alternative *programs* rather than alternative *schools*. As such, those programs are not subject to accountability on their own. Instead, the school they operate within is subject to accountability. The state has developed monitoring processes to ensure alternative programs are evaluated and held accountable as stand-alone programs, outside of the accountability system.
- Separate system of accountability for alternative schools in ESSA state plan.
 - **Colorado** includes a separate system of accountability for alternative schools in their ESSA plan.

Resources on Alternative Education and Accountability

[American Youth Policy Forum](#) is a national organization focused on providing learning opportunities for policymakers, practitioners and researchers working with youth. AYPF has produced several resources on alternative education and accountability.

- [Measuring Success: Accountability for Alternative Education](#) (2017) aims to address four key opportunities states have both within and outside of ESSA to improve alternative education, including sections on: defining alternative education, accountability systems and measures and continuous improvement.
- [ESSA and Understanding Accountability in Alternative Education](#) (2016): This advisory meeting of key thought leaders focused on what accountability in alternative education might look like in the future. The meeting included presentations from AYPF, and representatives from Colorado, Washington and California.

This 2017 [analysis from Policy Analysis for California Education \(PACE\)](#) outlines examples of alternative school accountability systems in several states and provides context for the California system.