

[\[DATA\] View an Excel file containing North Star accountability data.](#)



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## **Minnesota Recognizes 526 Schools for Excellence, Prioritizes Schools for Support to Improve Students' Educational Experiences**

*Minnesota replaces decades-old system based solely on test scores in favor of North Star accountability system which places equity at center of school supports and recognition*

ROSEVILLE – Today, the Minnesota Department of Education recognized 526 public schools across the state as top performers in multiple areas of progress in school performance. The recognition is a key part of the state's new [North Star accountability system](#), which aims to create more equitable and well-rounded learning opportunities for all students across the state. Using data from the [five key indicators](#) that make up North Star—achievement and progress on state reading and math tests over time, progress towards English language proficiency, graduation rates and consistent attendance—the state is better able to identify and learn from schools that consistently perform at high levels across multiple domains.

**"For over 20 years, we have relied far too much on test scores as the sole measure of school performance,"** said Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius. **"This misguided approach has resulted in a status quo that has not only skewed the perception of how our schools are doing, but has narrowed and limited opportunities for students to experience a rich and well-rounded education."**

Data released today also guided the state in prioritizing 485 schools that will receive varying levels of support over the next three years. Under North Star, Minnesota will prioritize the highest level of comprehensive support to 47 schools working to improve across multiple measures, and 147 high schools with graduation rates below 67 percent overall or for any individual student group. Schools prioritized for comprehensive support will work with the state's Regional Centers of Excellence, with experts working hand-in-hand with school leadership teams to assess the unique challenges and needs facing educators and students in a given building. Center staff provide specialized support to schools in areas including support to English learners, equity, graduation, implementation, math, reading and special education. More targeted support will be provided to 157 schools that may need to focus on a single student group, or may need support on just some of the measures. Another 134 schools will have access to additional training and networking opportunities from the Minnesota Department of Education.

**"North Star places equity at the heart of our work to help all schools serve students well,"** said Cassellius. **"It points us toward the schools that will benefit from intensive support and schools that are positioned to**

**offer lessons about how to help others improve. We will only realize higher outcomes for every student when we fully embrace new strategies to take on this difficult work.”**

The new North Star accountability system was developed over the past two years in partnership with thousands of Minnesotans and dozens of community organizations to satisfy and align requirements of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the state’s World’s Best Workforce law (WBWF), which focuses on supporting districts in meeting locally determined goals. For the first time, the state will identify and provide system level support to 50 districts and charter schools.

## **North Star: Minnesota’s New System for Support, Recognition and Reporting**

The foundation of North Star’s [process for prioritization](#) is a stage-based approach to school accountability that uses multiple measures of evaluation, including achievement and progress over time on state tests, progress toward English language proficiency for students learning English, four- and seven-year graduation rates, and consistent attendance. The new system reflects Minnesota’s commitment to equity and an accelerated sense of urgency in confronting disparities experienced by students who have been traditionally underserved, including students belonging to racial/ethnic student groups, English learners, students receiving special education services, and students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Importantly, every public school in the state is accountable under North Star, unlike previous systems that limited accountability efforts to the approximately 50 percent of schools receiving federal Title I funding.

Under North Star, schools already demonstrating success on the five key measures will be recognized annually with [badges for their websites](#), allowing them to celebrate and share their accomplishments with their students, families and greater community. Just as schools are held accountable for each student group they serve, they also will be recognized for their work in supporting students in each individual student group and asked to share their success broadly so that other schools may learn from them.

Minnesota’s transition from an annual release focused on standardized test results alone to a release of school accountability data is not unique to this state. ESSA requires that all states look beyond test data—more than student proficiency on a test at a single point in time—to offer a more comprehensive understanding of what is happening in schools.

**“Testing has always been a part of teaching and learning, but over the last two decades we have wrongly defined student success based solely on standardized tests, and our children’s access to rich and engaging learning environments has suffered because of it,”** said Cassellius. **“We are putting testing into its proper place by using it as one piece of important information alongside other data that, together, shine a bright light on a school’s quality or a student’s experience. Over the next several years, we plan to expand our data systems that collect course taking information, college and career readiness, and school climate measures. This will give us a better picture of school quality than what current data are able to provide.**

These shifts in philosophy require new ways of reporting information to the public in order to increase transparency and make meaning out of available data. Changes to the [Minnesota Report Card](#) in December 2018

will include a school “at a glance” report that will allow principals to offer their own qualitative information about their school. Changes in December 2018 will also strengthen reporting on discipline and equitable access to high-quality teachers. Further changes are coming in 2019 to report on how schools and districts equitably allocate funding across schools.

## **A Brief History of Accountability**

Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), states were required to label schools in varying degrees of failure, based on the narrow view of student proficiency on standardized tests. Facing public shaming and the threat of closure—as well as unrealistic goals and timelines—schools received little in the way of support to make real, systemic changes that could yield positive results for students. Minnesota became a leader among states in developing a more coherent accountability system when the federal government approved Minnesota’s NCLB flexibility waiver in 2012, followed by the adoption of a state accountability plan—the [World’s Best Workforce](#)—which requires school districts to annually align their budgets and improvement strategies to common statewide goals.

In December 2015, President Obama signed [ESSA](#), and it was enacted as the nation’s new pre-K through grade 12 federal education law. ESSA replaced NCLB, empowering states to develop systems and policies that place a sharp focus on equity and continuous improvement for all students, so that all students have what they need to succeed and all teachers and administrators have supports in place to deliver on that promise. The Minnesota Department of Education spent two years working closely with a diverse group of stakeholders, including consultation with Minnesota’s 11 unique sovereign Tribal Nations, to shape the [state’s ESSA plan](#), which resulted in the creation of North Star. The U.S. Department of Education approved Minnesota’s plan in January 2018.

## **Resources**

[View an Excel file containing North Star accountability data](#), including achievement and progress on state reading and math tests over time, progress towards English language proficiency, graduation rates and consistent attendance.

Parents and community members can review North Star data for schools and districts by visiting the [Minnesota Report Card](#). Visitors to the site will find information about schools recognized for excellence or prioritized for support, and learn what factors led to their identifications. The report card provides information about a school’s overall performance, and options to look closer at the data to identify areas for improvement or areas of success.

[View Minnesota’s state ESSA plan](#), which includes a summary of the state’s stakeholder engagement and development of North Star.