

# Amid national change, Fresno Unified touts rare accountability system

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While a national shift in the way public schools are held accountable for student achievement looms, Fresno Unified officials are confident they already are doing it right.

On Wednesday, the House of Representatives passed a bill that would replace the No Child Left Behind program with a system that involves less federal oversight and measures more than test scores.

The [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) is being touted as a compromise bill that moves away from a one-size-fits-all approach while still holding schools responsible. The Senate is expected to vote on the bill soon.

The act still requires annual standardized testing for students, but would allow states – not the federal government – to decide how much those test scores matter. Under the new system, states would set their own goals for academic progress, but those goals would have to be approved by the U.S. Department of Education.

The new system also would take into account factors outside of academics, including a measure for “school climate” – things such as student engagement or access to Advanced Placement courses.

But Fresno Unified already is doing a lot of that. The district is among a handful of [CORE](#) districts in the state that received a waiver from No Child Left Behind requirements, and has set up its own formula for how to rate schools.

On Friday, CORE, or California Office to Reform Education, which also includes Los Angeles Unified and San Francisco Unified, unveiled its new [school quality improvement index](#): 60 percent of student progress will be measured by academics and 40 percent will be measured by “social-emotional and culture-climate” factors such as suspension and expulsion rates, and student and parent surveys.

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Fresno Unified Superintendent Michael Hanson

The districts are the first in the country to consider social-emotional aspects in an accountability system, and the new index is based largely off a system that Fresno Unified already is using.

“Our new school-quality index offers schools a flashlight, not a hammer,” Fresno Unified Superintendent Michael Hanson, who chairs the CORE board of directors, said in a statement.

“The school districts participating in the development and use of the index have chosen to shine a brighter, wider light on the needs of all students and on their own educational strategies and practices to improve student learning and achievement. They are not seeking to avoid accountability, but rather to create a better, more comprehensive system to inform and guide the efforts of schools to improve learning opportunities for students.”

It’s unclear how No Child Left Behind waivers will be affected if the new law goes into effect, but Fresno Unified spokeswoman Amy Idsvoog is confident there won’t be much change for Fresno Unified.

“The work from FUSD and the CORE districts is leading this legislation. I don’t see it as something that’s going to change everything we do. I think this is actually the example that the new legislation is leaning toward,” she said.

“So much is always about academic achievement, but this is really a focus on educating the whole child, and I think the feds see the benefit in it.”

CORE districts will publicly release school reports on 2014-15 data in early February.

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