

The Acronym That Helps: ATSI and Its Impact on School Improvement

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The field of education has no shortage of acronyms. The latest is ATSI, Additional Targeted Support and Improvement. Now that you know what the acronym stands for, you might yourself wonder, “Am I ATSI?” What does it mean to be identified as a school in need of ATSI?

The designation of ATSI comes from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act which was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965. It was reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind act of 2001 by President George W. Bush. The act then went on to be adjusted and renamed yet again in 2015 under President Barack Obama as the Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA which is still the current iteration of ESEA. In summary, ESSA refers to the latest reauthorization of ESEA.

Part of ESSA is the school designation previously identified as ATSI. This means that a school has an underperforming student group which some of you might know or typically reference as your target group. This group is identified due to the identified need through state assessments which reflect that while your school in the broad sense might be performing at the desired level, a smaller group of students in your school is in need of additional supports to meet that same benchmark.

In Utah, schools receive points for how they perform on the RISE or the Utah Aspire Plus tests. It is important to note that most of these points are awarded based on student growth on these tests from the previous years scores. These yearly assessments and reports are described as accountability cycles. For the purposes of accountability, middle schools are included with elementary schools. High schools have the potential to earn additional points for graduation, ACT scores, and enrollment of students in advanced coursework.

All of these points are added together for a total. Schools are then ranked to determine who has the highest percentage of points and the lowest. The lowest 5% of schools provide what is referred to as the “cut score,” which is the score that separates the highest 95% of schools from the lowest 5% of schools.

If any school above the lowest 5% has a student group, like Students with Disabilities, English Language Learners¹, or students who might be economically disadvantaged, that on its own falls below the 5% cut score mentioned above, then that student group and school are flagged for ATSI. If the student group’s performance and points stay below the 5% cut score (which changes from year to year) for a second consecutive year, then that student group becomes ATSI.

Here is an example: Rockstar Elementary was performing generally well, but one of its student groups—Students with Disabilities—was below the 5% cut score in 2018 and then again in 2019. This student group qualified Rockstar for ATSI status because it fell below the 5% cut threshold for two consecutive years. Rockstar has needed to focus on this student group so that they can exit ATSI status.

A school has four years to show student group improvement to exit ATSI status. Of course, this was all complicated by the pandemic. Schools were identified in 2018 and 2019 for ATSI supports. These supports were interrupted to a certain extent during COVID. Schools identified in 2019 did not receive feedback on their progress until 2022. There was a break in identifying schools between 2019 and 2022. We have now revitalized ATSI as a state. Schools identified in 2018 have until 2024 to exit ATSI. Title I schools that are not able to exit a student group in four years become CSI (another acronym!)—comprehensive support and improvement. This means that additional resources and supports are provided for the *whole school* rather than just student group improvement.

A school can exit ATSI when the identified student group performs above the lowest 5% for two consecutive years. In 2022, we were able to exit some student groups and schools from ATSI based on two years worth of data showing progress.

To further the example above, Rockstar Elementary was identified for ATSI in 2019 after their Students with Disabilities student group fell below the state 5% cut score for two consecutive years. In 2022, the student group fell above the 5% cut score because of their hard work and attention to the specific needs of this student group. They are eagerly awaiting the results of this year’s accountability cycle, which is anticipated in the fall. If their students with disabilities are again above the 5% cut, they will exit ATSI early. If the student group is below the 5%, the school will need to recalibrate and find a way to differently serve this student group. Officially, Rockstar Elementary has until 2025 to exit their Students with Disabilities student group out of ATSI.

¹ Some scholars prefer the terminology multilingual learners or MLLs. You may start to hear this more often. As of now, the federal government still uses EL for English Learner or ELL for English Language Learner. I try to keep the terminology consistent here.

Why ATSI is Important

ATSI allows us to shed light on equity issues in our schools. We may provide similar supports to all of our students, which is equality. But if there is a student group that is underperforming, this means that we may need to provide a different level or intensity of supports for that group. This is what scholars mean when they refer to equity: some students need more or different, and that is okay.

ATSI provides us actionable information about which student groups aren't doing as well and need a different set of supports. When we use it correctly, ATSI becomes a resource to help us figure out which student groups need us to alter our efforts to make sure they are getting what they need.

The Center for Continuous School Improvement

The Center for Continuous School Improvement, under the leadership of Director Tracy Vandeventer, was created to address school improvement throughout the state. We are a team of individuals with a wide variety of educational experiences who are available to help with ATSI (as well as other school improvement needs).

School improvement is not just a one-and-done deal. It is constant. Our team is happy to help with this process. Schools might benefit from reaching out to a member of our team and sharing some of your problems of practice related to school improvement. We have worked with many ATSI schools this past year. None of us are experts—we are simply good thought partners willing to assist with your school improvement needs.

How do I know I am ATSI?

The following website has lists of ATSI schools from 2018, 2019, and 2022 (remember that interruption for COVID?). You can access them here:

<https://schools.utah.gov/assessment/resources>.

If you need help understanding the data, give us a call or send an email. We are here to help!

About the Author

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