



## Strengthening Stakeholder Engagement in Illinois: Recommendations for ISBE's ESSA State Plan Development

ESSA presents new opportunities for shaping education policy by recasting federal, state, and local roles in ensuring educational equity. **Input and support from a broad and politically inclusive set of stakeholders is critical for advancing equity through the implementation of ESSA and for the ultimate sustainability of the law and of equity efforts in states, districts, and schools across the country.**

### What's in this document?

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### All Stakeholders can Play a Role:

**Families and school communities**, including teachers, often have the best understanding of what impacts students the most, and know what information and action is needed in order to better serve all students.

**Advocates, researchers, and philanthropists** can support decision makers by pointing to research-based recommendations for action and supporting attention to conditions that disproportionately affect our highest-need students.

**School and district leaders and other policy-focused stakeholders** are often best positioned to support a systems-based understanding of the issues, to connect stakeholders and encourage their participation in shaping and implementing education policy.

**Government Agencies and elected officials** will be integral in coordinating services and passing legislation that will be needed to ensure efficient and successful implementation of state and local ESSA plans.



# ESSA Stakeholder Engagement Provisions

The following is a brief overview of the explicit requirements for stakeholder engagement in the new federal law:

**ESSA State Plans** (*Title I, Section 1111*): States must work with stakeholders for State Plan development, including a period of public comment for 30 days or more; determination of N-size; development of the Comprehensive and Targeted Improvement Plans; collection and dissemination of effective parent and family engagement strategies to LEAs and schools; and the development and presentation of the state report card system.

**ESSA LEA Plans** (*Title I, Section 1112*): LEAs must develop their intervention plans in meaningful consultation with stakeholders, and that implementation strategies (including the identification of eligible student most in need of Title I services) include meaningful engagement as well.

**Innovative Assessment and Accountability Demonstration Authority** (*Title I, Section 1204*): Applications must demonstrate stakeholder collaboration in the development of the assessment(s) and assessment scoring; and must include a description of how the SEA will inform and gather feedback from stakeholders at the beginning of each year of implementation.

**Flexibility for Equitable Per-Pupil Funding & Assessment System Audit** (*Title I, Sections 1501, 1202*): Applications must include assurance that the pilot/program will be developed and implemented in collaboration with stakeholders.

**Formula Grants to States & Subgrants to LEAs [Teacher and Principal Training and Recruiting Fund]** (*Title II, Sections 2101, 2102*): SEAs must meaningfully consult with stakeholders to learn how to best improve the State's efforts under Title II.

**English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement** (*Title III, Section 3102*): The SEA and specifically qualified agency plans must be developed in consultation with stakeholders.

**Subgrants to Eligible Entities [English Language Acquisition and Language Enhancement]** (*Title III, Section 3115*): Local grants must promote family and community engagement in the education of English learners and that the plans be developed in consultation with stakeholders.

**National Professional Development Project** (*Title III, Section 3131*): Local grants must promote family and community engagement in the education of English learners.

**LEA Applications under [21st Century Schools]** (*Title IV, Section 4106*): LEA applications must be developed and implemented in continued consultation with stakeholders.

**State Application [21st Century Schools]** (*Title IV, Section 4203*): State applications must be developed in consultation and coordination with stakeholders.

**Promise Neighborhoods** (*Title IV, Section 4624*): Applications must include a needs assessment and include stakeholder engagement in the development and implementation processes.

**Full Service Community Schools** (*Title IV, Section 4625*): The Secretary must prioritize consortiums comprised of a broad representation of stakeholders or consortiums demonstrating a history of effectiveness.

**Programs for Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native Students** (*Title VI, Section 6111*): LEAs must ensure that programming be operated and evaluated in consultation with stakeholders.



## Key Decision Points in ESSA

### What are We Engaging About?

ESSA includes several **Key Decision Points** that present opportunities for states to work with communities to design and implement an effective and equitable education system. They are also prime opportunities for engagement based on their high stakes nature, impact on equity, and potential to influence state policy. These Include:

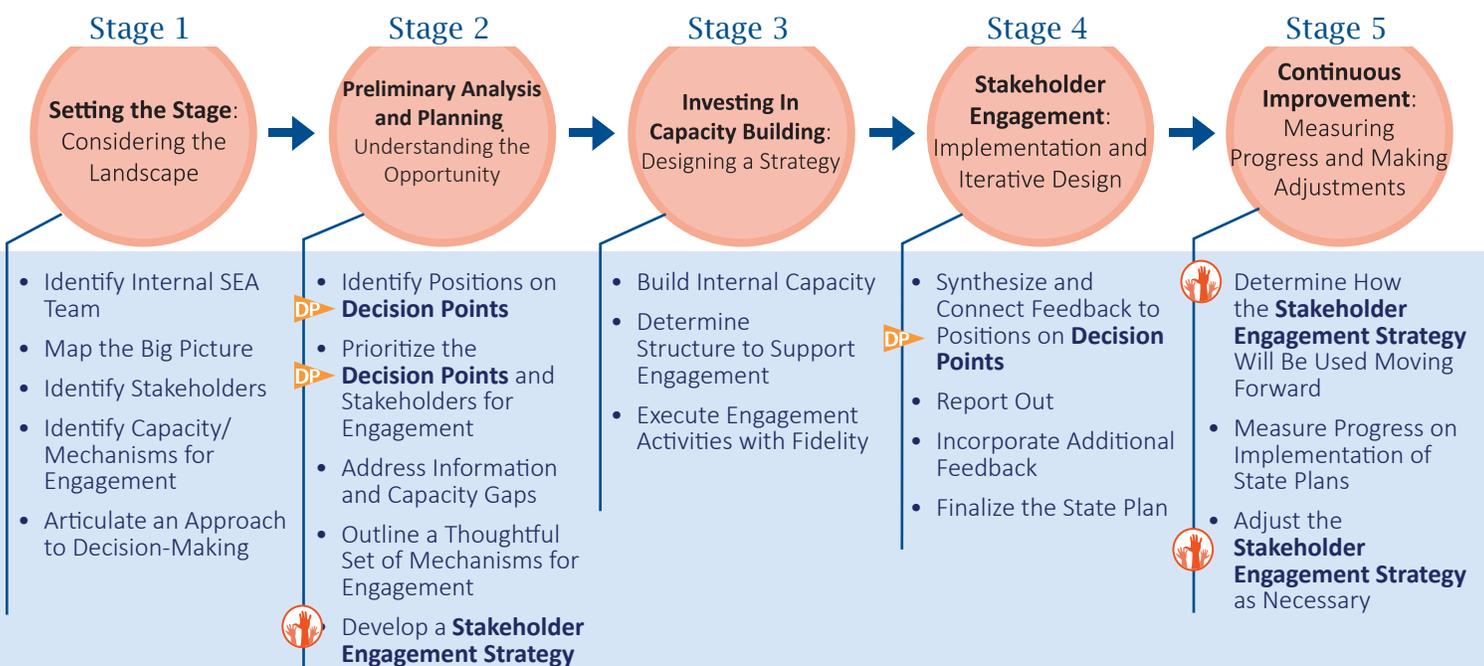
- DP** **Accountability:** Goals for Student Achievement; Accountability Indicators; N-Size, Report Cards and Data Reporting
- DP** **School Improvement Supports:** School Improvement Funding; Support and Improvement for Struggling Schools
- DP** **Assessment:** Assessment Audits
- DP** **School Environment:** Plans for Reduction of Harassment, Restraint and Seclusion, and suspension/expulsion
- DP** **English Learners:** Identification, English Language Proficiency Assessments, and Redesignation
- DP** **Students with Disabilities:** Alternative Standards and Assessment; Accommodations; Data Collection and Reporting
- DP** **Foster and Homeless Students:** Designated Point of Contact; Data Collection and Reporting
- DP** **Innovative Pilots:** Innovative Assessment Pilot; Weighted Student Funding Pilot
- DP** **Teacher and Leader Quality:** Educator Equity; Teacher and Leader Evaluation Systems – Professional Development
- DP** **Charter Schools:** Charter School Organization and Accountability
- DP** **Early Childhood Education:** Early Childhood Education and Preschool Development Grants
- DP** **Funding:** Grant Applications and Allocation

For more on building a state strategy for stakeholder engagement, see the **SEA Handbook**:



## Building a Strategy for Engagement

As Illinois works to build its ESSA State Plan, ISBE should build upon and align existing engagement strategy to ensure, in accordance with the law, that they are creating opportunities for robust, meaningful collaboration and information-sharing such that all voices may be heard. This process includes the following stages:





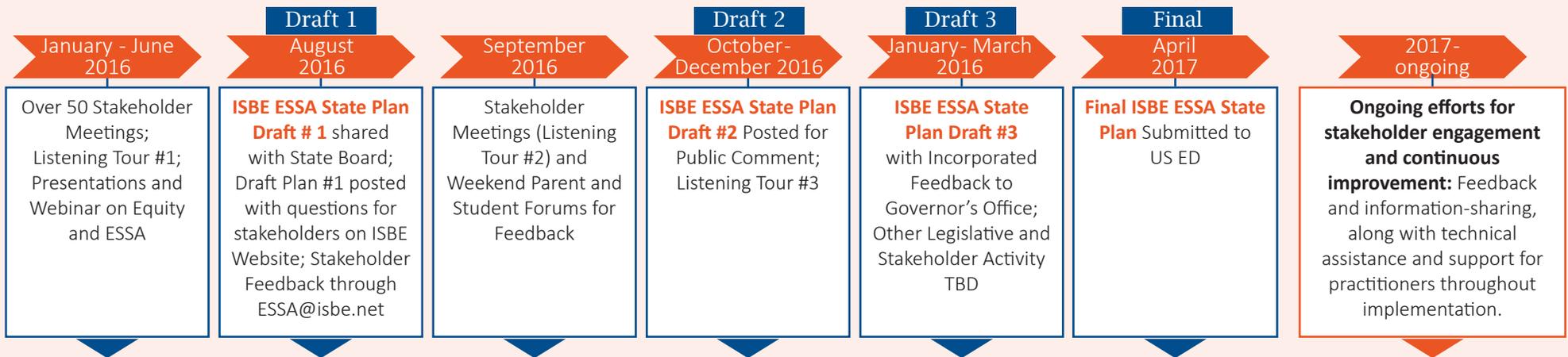
## ESSA Stakeholders to be Engaged

<b>Civil Rights Organizations</b>	<i>State:</i> Organizations that expressly support or advocate for underserved students (students of color, low-income students, ELs, students with disabilities, e.g. State Conferences of the NAACP) <i>Local:</i> Local affiliates (e.g. Urban League affiliates), local alliances, school-based support centers/providers, youth development organizations
<b>Educators</b>	<i>State:</i> National union affiliates, teacher networks, state union federations (e.g. Teacher Union Reform Network, Professional Association of Illinois Educators, Educators for Excellence) <i>Local:</i> Local union chapters, childcare providers, early learning practitioners, Head Start and Early learning leaders, charter teacher alliances, teacher preparation programs, labor-management alliances
<b>Advocacy</b>	<i>State:</i> Grasstops organizations, education lobbying organizations <i>Local:</i> Community-based organizations (CBOs), families and family organizations, early learning advocates, students and student organizations, school-based personnel, community coalitions focused on public education
<b>Philanthropy</b>	<i>State &amp; Local:</i> Local, state and national-level foundations or collaborative organizations with interest in state, district, or policy-based funding
<b>Business Community</b>	<i>State &amp; Local:</i> Corporations, health and social service providers, local business organizations, faith-based organizations, and GED and workforce programs
<b>Early Learning Leaders</b>	<i>State:</i> state Head Start association, state early learning advisory council, state child care associations or organizations <i>Local:</i> Head Start providers, community and faith-based preschool providers, center-based child care providers, home-based child care providers, local early childhood collaboratives, home visiting programs, Part C providers
<b>Higher Ed, Certification, Research</b>	<i>State &amp; Local:</i> Accreditation institutions for K-12 and higher education, teacher certification programs, state university systems, historically black colleges and universities, postsecondary minority institutions, community college systems
<b>Professional Associations</b>	<i>State &amp; Local:</i> School boards, school business officials, school administrators, superintendents, principals
<b>Elected Officials</b>	<i>State:</i> Governor, state board members <i>Local:</i> Mayors, City/County Council members, school boards
<b>State Agencies and Governmental Bodies</b>	Representatives from Indian Tribes, housing , health/human services, Charter Management Operators (CMOs)
<b>Local Agencies</b>	Districts, school leadership, mental and physical health providers (e.g. clinics, preventive health, teacher consultancies, trauma-informed), CMOs, alternative and transitional education providers
<b>Parents, Families, and Communities</b>	<i>State:</i> associations and organizations representing parents and families (e.g. state PTA, statewide parent advocacy organizations) <i>Local:</i> Parent and community organizers and local parent/family advocacy groups, Parents, Families, Community Members
<b>Student Groups</b>	<i>State &amp; Local:</i> Youth and student groups that operate at the state and local levels



## Timeline of Engagement Efforts in Illinois: Developing the State Plan

The **Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)** has been working with stakeholders around the state to develop their ESSA State Plan, including: providing an email portal to accept feedback along with resources on an ESSA-specific ISBE webpage; hosting two listening tours throughout the state; convening and seeking the input of select stakeholders (for example, the P-20 Council) throughout the state; writing and posting a draft plan for public comment and input from the State Board along with a *Reader's Guide* and explicit questions for stakeholder input; and providing a **transparent timeline for plan development**.



### Questions to Consider

- How will ISBE improve stakeholder engagement with low-income and minority communities in this process or other processes?
- Has ISBE ensured that relevant data and evidence will be provided to inform and promote stakeholder dialogue?
- What are effective mechanisms for relaying feedback back to stakeholders once it has been collected and keeping track of input as it is incorporated into the state plan?
- How might stakeholder engagement efforts and strategies used in State Plan development become increasingly more targeted and focused, collaborative, and implemented on an ongoing basis, beyond State Plan submission?
- How will ISBE shift from a listening-centered approach to engagement with stakeholders to facilitating a more real-time, interactive, dynamic?

### Meaningful Means Ongoing

What are the mechanisms in place for ongoing engagement and continuous improvement?

What are the ways in which stakeholders will continue to be engaged throughout implementation, moving forward?

How can stakeholder engagement efforts implemented throughout plan development be utilized after the State Plan is submitted in 2017?



## Stakeholder Engagement in Illinois: Recommendations

**PRINCIPLE 1: Hold stakeholder engagement and the pursuit of equity and excellence as inseparable endeavors** that must be practiced and reflected throughout the full decision-making and implementation process.

- **Create systemic structures and expectations** that embed stakeholder engagement throughout the policy planning process, in a regular and ongoing manner.
- **Prioritize more equitable outcomes for students throughout all policy and reform efforts**, taking into account both the immediate and cumulative impact of reforms on classrooms and school practice, and the improvement of key programs and activities.

### Recommendations

#### Prioritizing Equity

- ISBE should develop tools and practices that prioritize historically underrepresented stakeholders and ensure districts and schools effectively and efficiently identify and use resources to enable all students to achieve state content and performance standards. For example, building system-wide leadership and capacity to ensure continuous improvement, ISBE should expand effective programs and policies and eliminate ineffective ones (e.g. connecting statewide data systems that track resource investments, programs, and outcomes; developing work plans; and evaluating the impact of cross-sector, inter-agency collaboratives and workgroups).

**PRINCIPLE 2: Include diverse groups of stakeholders, with a commitment to engaging historically excluded voices.** Such a commitment goes beyond a more diverse invite list, and considers the structures, norms, timelines, languages, etc. that may unintentionally elevate some voices over others.

- **Work with key community leaders and networks** to identify and prioritize opportunities for stakeholder engagement, not only to understand and identify program challenges, but also as part of decision-making processes on funding, accountability, supports, interventions, data reporting and assessment.
- **Assess local community histories, needs, and resources** to develop a map of stakeholders that considers their knowledge, background, and expertise to inform key decisions.
- **Invest in diverse channels and mechanisms** to build public awareness and solicit feedback. Actively engage and support stakeholders that best represent the demographic, geographic, language, and political diversity of the state and make up a cross-section of community perspectives and experiences.

**Partnership Highlight:** There are already strong examples within Illinois of collaborative efforts at the school and district level. The Partnership for Resilience, whose members include teachers' unions, the Consortium for Educational Change, health care organizations, and Governors State University, works in districts in Chicago's southern suburbs to improve academic, health, and social outcomes for children by building sustainable community partnerships, developing and sharing informational resources, providing training and education programs, and advocating for the implementation of research-based policies.



**The perspectives of historically excluded students** (e.g. English Learners, foster youth) should not be seen as isolated sets of challenges experienced by a specific subgroup. And outreach and engagement efforts should not merely focus on increasing access to the existing decision-making structures and protocols. Rather, ESSA provides an opportunity for ISBE and districts to provide new and more responsive opportunities for the students, families, and communities whose voices have often been marginalized, to inform and support system changes, question traditional decision-making practices, and mobilize around the new law.





## Stakeholder Engagement in Illinois: Recommendations

### Recommendations

#### Including a Diverse Group of Stakeholders

- **Strengthening Mechanisms of Engagement:** ISBE should work with community partners to improve how stakeholders are engaged and ensure stakeholder input is actively considered in policy decisions. ISBE should:
  - Design agendas that prioritize participatory activities and provide written follow up to participants that acknowledges and elevates the critical perspectives these communities bring;
  - Actively structure information sessions to consider the mechanisms, structures, norms, timelines, languages, and practices that elevate some voices over others;
  - Provide meeting materials in languages and formats accessible to all prospective meeting participants, ideally in advance of the meeting. ISBE should include translated materials and simultaneous interpretation services for non-English speakers and make materials available in an accessible form, including providing accommodations for stakeholders with special communications needs, and should also support LEAs in doing the same; and
  - Dedicate resources specifically to the engagement of stakeholders who represent historically underrepresented demographic, geographic, language, and political groups and who represent a broad range of perspectives and experiences.
- **Strengthening and Diversifying Partnerships:** ISBE should develop and strengthen its networks connecting civil rights groups, community and parent groups, health-focused organizations, and researchers with schools, districts, and the state. Some important considerations for achieving these ends include:
  - Prioritizing long term engagement with underrepresented and underserved communities;
  - Making information (e.g. opportunities for input and feedback, regular updates on ongoing priorities) available to these communities -- and to the schools and districts that serve them -- in ways that are directly responsive to their needs and concerns;
  - Working with superintendents and districts to ensure clarity and effectiveness of communication tools and strategies;
  - Supporting state and district efforts to prioritize procedural and informational transparency (e.g. including sharing decision-making timelines and evaluation cycles, relevant data/evidence, and describing expected impacts), particularly around significant policy and resource decisions;
  - Engaging legislators, especially in areas where implementing legislation will be necessary; and
  - Committing to convening around annual state reporting to US ED at the state and district levels.
- ISBE should ensure that all stakeholders are included in conversations and foster an explicit collaboration effort. *For a list of stakeholder groups to include, please see page 3.*

**PRINCIPLE 3: Support stakeholder engagement that is well-informed** by developing and distributing necessary background information and by offering preliminary thoughts about key decision points and implications for program resource allocation, assessment and accountability.

- **Be intentional about making time and space** for learning and discussion among a diverse group of stakeholders throughout the process of designing, implementing, assessing, and refining reform efforts.
- **Engage communities** to review information and recommend and design improvements that reflect collaborative approaches towards building consensus.

**Partnerships with stakeholders** must be actively facilitated and supported through coordination at the national, state, and local level. In addition to “Town Hall” events and “Listening Tours” organized ahead of state and federal policy deadlines, establishing expectations, resources, and tools for parent, family, and community involvement in policy matters throughout the implementation process would go far in establishing shared accountability for continuous improvement. 



## Stakeholder Engagement in Illinois: Recommendations

### Recommendations Informed Stakeholder Engagement

- ISBE should accompany draft material with additional informational resources and questions to consider.
- ISBE should package a clear analysis of feedback to date that includes the iterative Illinois ESSA State Plan timeline, and next steps.
- ISBE should prepare and make materials available well in advance of meetings, and have printed materials available for stakeholders to reference during the meetings, and to share with their constituents following the convening.
- ISBE can communicate a unified mission and vision about the importance of working with stakeholders to create and strengthen its educational system by working with community partners to develop materials, co-facilitate meetings, and support consistent messaging. Wherever possible, the State Superintendent of Instruction should contribute to stakeholder engagement and messaging efforts either in-person or via pre-recorded or remote video to demonstrate ISBE's commitment to authentic engagement.
- To ease and improve the transition to ESSA, ISBE should develop, distribute, and provide support around materials designed to assist LEAs prior to the conclusion of the 2016-17 school year, with related trainings and technical assistance efforts planned through the beginning of the 2017-18 school year.
- ISBE should amend the timing and format of listening tours and other public engagement events to a more interactive discussion-based format, and schedule options at various times in the day to allow for more comprehensive input from a broader range of community members.

**PRINCIPLE 4: Focus on continuous improvement as an essential paradigm/framework for engagement**, including reflection on key decisions and implementation, as well as on the stakeholder engagement process itself.

- **Commit to transparent, evidence-based decision-making**, including establishing and following clear and consistent decision-making processes and timelines.
- **Establish a cycle of identifying opportunities for improvement**, taking action through planning and implementation, and assessing impact to inform next steps.
- **Determine how collaboration and engagement will inform an ongoing continuous improvement cycle** regarding state ESSA plans and related state policy; ensure that stakeholder engagement generates input and insight at key reflection and decision points.
- **Adapt strategies, allowing them to evolve** based on new data, information, needs, and resources; remain fluid and flexible in response to stakeholder input.

**Partnership Highlight:** The work of the Illinois Federation of Community Schools reflects a multi-disciplinary and inter-organizational commitment to a comprehensive, whole-child approach, with the recognition that health, wellness, social and human services, youth development and family-serving organizations all have a specific role to play in creating high quality teaching and learning environments. This extends beyond needs assessments and community meetings to consider opportunities for braided local and state funding and collaborative staffing practices to better align services, reduce redundancies, and support shared accountability for student success, such as placement of Department of Human Services counselors in high-need schools.





## Stakeholder Engagement in Illinois: Recommendations

### Recommendations Continuous Improvement

- ISBE should include community-based voices in early design and planning stages, and incorporate stakeholder feedback into ongoing implementation decisions; LEAs and schools will need ISBE's support and leadership in doing the same at a local level.
- ISBE should develop a formal system of engaging communities throughout the ESSA implementation process that considers capacity, staffing, resources, and decision-making authority, to ensure continuous improvement.
- ISBE should also provide the following kinds of assistance to schools and districts:
  - How to facilitate meaningful conversations at the local level.
  - How to help schools and districts apply conversations with stakeholders throughout the policy planning and implementation process.
  - How to establish local partnerships around evidence-based practices, evaluation, and understanding data.
  - How to develop tools to support improvement planning for schools identified under the state accountability plan.
- ISBE should commit to and model procedural and informational transparency over the coming years. This should include widely sharing decision-making timelines and evaluation cycles, relevant data/evidence, and information on progress made towards expected outcomes.
- ISBE should commit to convening stakeholders around annual state reporting to US ED at the state and district levels, to share information and to refine priorities.
- Mechanisms for stakeholder voice and policy conversations should be continually examined to ensure they are including groups representative of Illinois' broad and diverse population.
- ISBE should provide examples of authorized spending under Title I and Title IV.
- State and district entities should be included in co-facilitation and collaboration, and the independent efforts of community partners (family and local community advocates) should be supported by ISBE where possible.
- We also encourage ISBE's development of guidance in the form of an ESSA implementation district toolkit that draws upon the expertise of local stakeholders focused on community engagement and the perspectives of people that have not historically been engaged. This guidance should set expectations and accountability around local engagement and support LEAs in creating structures for policy development through sustained community collaboration. Among others, we suggest this toolkit cover the following topics:
  - Identifying district and school responsibilities in ESSA implementation
  - Engaging with stakeholders in a meaningful and sustained fashion
  - Prioritizing engagement with historically excluded voices
  - Using state and local data sources to inform accountability and report card efforts
  - Assessing needs and community resources
  - Developing structures to support the development of improvement plans
  - Identifying areas of flexibility where LEAs have the opportunity to go beyond requirements

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\* *Partners for* is in the process of producing a Local Education Agency toolkit for ESSA implementation that states can adapt and localize for this purpose.



## Stakeholder Engagement in Illinois: Recommendations

### Recommendations Continuous Improvement

- ISBE should create an internal and/or cross-agency team to support and oversee the work of developing and implementing stakeholder engagement systems for continuous improvement.
- ISBE should remain transparent about timelines and processes throughout plan development and implementation. *For a timeline of current planning and engagement efforts and questions to consider, see Page 4.*

### **PRINCIPLE 5: Seek to build consensus pragmatically; effective collaboration doesn't always mean full consensus.**

- **Strive to find common ground**, be willing to work across political divides, and build on each other's expertise.
- **Commit to an understanding that the end product will result in some give-and-take** on all sides.

### Recommendations Effective Collaboration

- ISBE should develop close partnerships with a diverse array of local stakeholders and networks (e.g. multi-stakeholder alliances, partnership, voluntary initiatives, or existing collaborative projects) to encourage deeper and more fruitful collaboration between schools and their communities, and enable the development of better, more comprehensive approaches to supporting students, staff, and schools.
- ISBE should partner with stakeholders to present evidence for decision making where possible, and seek ways to model or test practical solutions in different contexts.



## Additional Resources

Partners *for* Each and Every Child

[In Consultation With... The Case for Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement](#) | July 2016

[A Handbook for Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement: A tool for SEAs](#) | July 2016

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)

[“Let’s Get This Conversation Started: Strategies, Tools, Examples and Resources to Help States Engage with Stakeholders to Develop and Implement their ESSA Plans...”](#) | June 2016

Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

[Parent and Family Engagement Provisions in the ESSA](#) | January 2016

U.S. Department of Education

[Dear Colleague Letter: the Importance of Stakeholder Engagement Throughout the Transition to ESSA](#) | June 2016

Kent McGuire and Martin J. Blank

[ESSA’s Success Requires Stakeholder Engagement](#) | May 2016

For more information from Partners *for* Each and Every Child and our work in Illinois, please email us at [illinois@partnersforeachandeverychild.org](mailto:illinois@partnersforeachandeverychild.org)



For more information, to ask a question, or to submit feedback about the ESSA State Plan, please email ISBE at

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or visit the ISBE ESSA Website at

[www.ISBE.net/ESSA](http://www.ISBE.net/ESSA)