Have State Engagement Efforts Under ESSA Been Meaningful?
Partners for Each and Every Child would like to thank our state and national partners for their thoughtful and timely guidance in the production of *Process and Protest*.

In particular, we would like to express our deep appreciation to the State Education Agencies and the state-based advocates and partners that we were able to consult with directly during the development of this report:

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Process and Protest analyzes the consolidated ESSA state plans submitted to US ED for the April/May 2017 submission deadline, with specific attention to how SEAs are establishing systems for ongoing dialogue with school leaders, practitioners, parents, students, and advocates. Our report explores how thoughtful, meaningful, structured, and ongoing dialogue among a variety of stakeholders is not only legally required, but is in fact essential to unlocking the promise of ESSA and advancing excellence with equity in our schools.

The seventeen submitted plans contain a mix of familiar engagement practices and some strikingly innovative approaches that aim to create systems for continuous improvement informed by fact-based, ongoing consultation with diverse communities. Our review of these plans identifies a few promising practices from individual states as well as some room for growth shared across states.

To conduct our review, we looked to the details of each state’s consolidated ESSA plan, as well as accompanying materials such as appendices and online resources. Where possible, we also conducted informational interviews with state and local officials and with representatives from state-based nonprofit groups.

Starting from these materials, we analyzed the ways in which states are preparing to support innovation and reform through stakeholder engagement, including the use of stakeholder input to drive strategy and policy reform in service of educational equity and excellence.
Dear Colleague,

The word “Stakeholder” has been flagged by EdWeek as number one on a list of education jargon words found in the 17 state ESSA plans submitted to US ED for review this Spring. This made me smile, given the timing of my own team’s analysis of the 17 state ESSA plans for stakeholder engagement, which I share here in the following 50+ pages.

At a recent dinner with friends and colleagues, we reflected on this commentary, on jargon, and on stakeholder engagement. These friends of mine—all of whom work in schools and districts—were all driven into their positions through the social and racial justice movement that is the field of education. We talked about how engagement can often feel like a joke, a compromise, or just a thing we say we did, instead of a meaningful and collaborative process meant to support our kids. We also agree that good PROCESS could prevent PROTEST, but also that protest can be a healthy response within a meaningful process.

I also recently attended a stakeholder engagement event where—while intentions were pure—those of us being “engaged” grew increasingly frustrated. We were confused and discouraged by the sub-standard presentation, the lack of information offered to understand how to make thoughtful decisions, and the assumptions made about our readiness to weigh in collectively and on the spot about “indicators” and “interim goals.” We were being asked to respond to important questions about our schools and students without the investment of time and information it takes to do so meaningfully.

I know I am not the only one of us who has attended such an event, and I can also admit here with all humility that I am sure I have even run such an event. But there are a few things at the core of any effort to make engagement better: taking a hard look at what we’ve tried in the past, honestly reflecting on what’s not working, and coming up with solutions together.

We offer here that the success and sustainability of efforts to improve educational excellence and equity, particularly with regard to our most vulnerable students and communities, requires robust and thoughtful partnership between and among federal and state and local governmental agencies and stakeholders, to address misconceptions, empower new voices, and ensure shared ownership for the reforms our schools need. This is what we mean when we say “stakeholder engagement.”

This review of states’ efforts to engage with their communities is our attempt to look at engagement efforts honestly, to consider that which we all know engagement often is and isn’t—which my friends at dinner were thinking when they laughed about engagement as a high-frequency jargon word—and to suss out what it can be and what it must be.

We’ve looked at state engagement activities in this year+ of ESSA, with both the required and aspirational elements of “stakeholder engagement” in mind, and we ask that states and districts do the same. We found some common threads among state
efforts to include communities in policy decision-making, which we write about through five “promising practices” for engagement:

1. REACH THE UNREACHED
2. SHOW YOUR WORK
3. SHOW SOME GRIT
4. MAXIMIZE RESOURCES
5. DOUBLE DOWN

More than six decades since Brown v. Board of Education, it is clear that equity does not just happen based on people’s good intentions. Moving toward equity requires courageous, vigilant disruption of education policy and practice, including who is involved and when.

Inclusive and collaborative habits and practices cannot remain solely within the purview of education professionals, but should allow for broad and meaningful distribution of responsibility and accountability for a shared goal of educational excellence. Sharing the responsibility starts with engagement.

And there is extraordinary urgency in changing these patterns. In communities with fewer fiscal resources and those facing significant challenges — efforts to improve systems often stagnate or reverse, leaving many students behind. Because of wide and persistent disparities in access to opportunity and educational attainment, the stakes are high.

At the state level, this transformation requires vigilant attention to opportunities for engagement, as well as dedicated resources, long-term investment, effective systems of accountability, and a strongly held commitment to an iterative process of collective inquiry and reflection.

An informed and adaptive, mutually accountable stakeholder community does not form overnight, and does require the attention and investment of all of us. We must build the capacity of state and local education agencies to advance evidence-based, equity-focused, pragmatic change, and include their communities in the process. **We are all stakeholders. We all have work to do.**

Molly Mauer

Director, Partners for Each and Every Child
A Project of The Opportunity Institute
....when you walked to the education committee hearing room, I [you] could tell by the amount of people outside [if] the vote would be hostile or whether or not. Or if it was going to be a long, long process.

So today, I was really anticipating thousands of people outside and when I pulled up and there was no one outside I said, 'OK, they’re all inside.'

So I was expecting when I got off the elevator at the fourth floor, I would be met with a lot of signs and protesters. But then there was nobody outside the room.

So I thought, 'Ok. They all fit in the room. Oh, this is going to be a disaster.'

But then, when I came in the room, they [the protesters] were not even in the room!

So as people talked [during public comment] I got a feel for the fact that our stakeholders really feel included in this plan. Nobody who spoke started off their presentation with ‘We feel that we were not heard. We feel that we were not listened to.’

Everyone had a chance to participate in this process. And I think that is our state working at it’s best.”
PART 1: ENGAGEMENT IS ESSENTIAL FOR EQUITY
The concept of “local control” is fraught for many of us who care deeply about advancing the interests of underserved and underrepresented groups. Our nation’s social and political history has made the concept controversial because of its connection to various “states' rights” campaigns that have been used to limit or deny the franchise of groups or to otherwise suppress the rights of those disfavored by a ruling minority. The critical turn, however, and the duality of the idea, is that the highest promise of our democratic system depends on local control, on civic engagement and rigorous participation embedded throughout districts, regions, states, and our nation.

In this report, we offer that the success and sustainability of efforts to improve educational excellence and equity is contingent upon our democracy prioritizing the needs of our most vulnerable students and communities. Robust and thoughtful partnership between and among actors at a federal, state, and local level are necessary to foster and support the active, meaningful, and ongoing participation of vulnerable students and their communities.

The elaboration of a process to shape, nurture, and sustain this engagement is vitally important to ensuring that communities and stakeholders are providing their educators and leaders with feedback that is well-informed, coherent, and actionable. Key to the functioning of this process is the role of protest, the registering of disagreement or opposition to current and proposed policies and practices.

Process and protest are closely, and beneficially, related: good approaches to stakeholder engagement actively enable and incorporate the voicing of differences of opinion. The opportunity to meaningfully voice and promptly address disagreements can build trust among groups, better inform policy decisions, and create a bipartisan base of support for sustained efforts to advance excellence and equity.

Meaningful, structured, and ongoing dialogue among a variety of stakeholders is not only legally required, but is in fact essential to unlocking the promise of federal legislation and other policy contexts and informing future efforts to advance excellence with equity in our schools.
In 2015 President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) after it passed the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate by large, bipartisan margins. Substantive, ongoing input and sustained pressure from a broad array of constituents, including educators, families, advocates, and state policymakers, drove Congressional leaders to reach the bipartisan compromise at the heart of ESSA: increased freedom for state innovation and flexibility with federal guidelines to ensure the meaningful consultation of local communities and to support the development of well-informed and fiscally responsible state and local policy.

Riding the bipartisan momentum behind the passage of ESSA, federal regulations under ESSA initially took a similar approach, with the U.S. Department of Education (US ED) using a notice and comment approach to gather and process stakeholder input on how to best serve low-income students, students with disabilities, English language learners, and students from a variety of different backgrounds. Partisan use of the the Congressional Review Act blocked these regulations from going into effect, largely leaving states and districts to interpret the law for themselves. Since then, we have seen the return of deeply partisan education politics in the nation’s capital. At a federal level, it appears the hope of a larger bipartisan moment has, for the moment, passed.

It is something of a mixed blessing that this return to a more partisan approach to policy in the federal government is occurring under an education law that reduces the federal government’s role in local educational decisions. The winnowing of the federal role in ESSA planning, regulation, and implementation raises the stakes significantly for state, regional, and local educational authorities.
Considering this diminished federal role, clear opportunities remain in states and districts for bipartisan collaboration on important issues of educational equity and excellence. It is important to note, however, that state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) under ESSA have a variety of new requirements with regard to stakeholder engagement and consultation, but not necessarily any additional dedicated funding or resources to help support these newly expanded responsibilities. Many SEAs and LEAs are, and will be, finding ways to do more with less guidance, less money, and less support from Congress and US ED. Not all SEAs and LEAs are equally well-positioned or ready to meet these expanded engagement and consultation requirements.

Still, there are many groups in states and districts—students, families, educators and school leaders, community members, elected officials, civil rights and advocacy groups, business leaders, and others—that also have a significant stake and interest in improving their state’s educational accountability system and advancing academic excellence and equity. Many of these groups have expertise, capacity, or resources that SEAs and LEAs do not.

To this end, ESSA’s faith in the expertise of local families, educators, practitioners, and advocates is well-placed. To have any chance at achieving better outcomes for students, however, the meaningful consultation that is so critically needed under ESSA will need long-term, focused support. This means state governments and local leaders will need to dedicate staff and resources, and partner with a wide variety of individuals and organizations, in service of those who are most vulnerable in these discussions and those whose interests are not politically well-represented.
Why We Are

Partners for Each and Every Child (Partners for) works to support equity and excellence in public education by aligning federal and national resources with efforts to support meaningful, inclusive, and ongoing dialogue at a state and local level. We are collaborating with partners in several states to use the ESSA planning, transition, and implementation process to advance educational excellence and equity in a bipartisan way.

Our efforts are intended to support SEAs, LEAs and advocates to support inclusive, ongoing dialogue both within and outside of state and district agencies and to develop evidence-based policies and pragmatic recommendations for education reform.

What We Do and Why

Partners for comes out of the Congressionally chartered Equity and Excellence Commission. The Commission’s central task, thirty years after A Nation at Risk, was to propose a new alignment of federal, state, and local efforts to improve education outcomes for our children. After years of deliberation, drafting, and negotiation, the Commission issued a unanimous final report, entitled “For Each and Every Child” (2013).

In keeping with the charge of the Commission, we are principally concerned with advancing equity and excellence in education policy across the nation. We believe that the interests of educational equity are best served through focused and ongoing dialogue with the communities that have the most to gain and to lose in education reform. In the federal and national policy community, and with state-based coalitions and organizations, we support inclusive efforts around educational equity and policies that recognize the value of stakeholder engagement.

To advance excellence and equity in education, we work with local and national partners that share a commitment to inclusive, equitable, and excellent public education. These partners include advocacy groups, policy makers, practitioners, community leaders, researchers, and others both inside and outside state agencies and district offices.

Partners for is working with SEAs to support their stakeholder engagement efforts, as they work to support LEAs in engaging school communities, teachers and leaders, families, and community representatives. We collaborate across political affiliations—Republican, Democrat, and Independent—to share resources, advance pragmatic recommendations for reform, and support the adoption of evidence-based, equity-focused policies.

A Network of Partners

Our Work Under ESSA
FOUR PILLARS OF EDUCATIONAL EQUITY*

Parent, Family, and Community Engagement and Consultation

Equitable Resources Aligned to Student Needs

Accountability for the Achievement of All Students

Easily Accessible and User Friendly Data

EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

WHAT THESE PILLARS MEAN FOR PARTNERS FOR

Educational equity means that every student—by race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, family background, and family income—has access to the resources and to the rigorous coursework they need, at the right moment in their education. Put simply, an equitable system is one where “historic barriers of racism, class and discrimination don’t determine any student’s opportunity to succeed.”1 To dismantle these barriers, there must be strong accountability, meaningful engagement, accessible information and data, and equitable distribution of resources based on student need.

These pillars are each essential, and are also interdependent. The foundation on which all of these pillars rest is stakeholder engagement, the meaningful and ongoing involvement of a broad and diverse community throughout policy development. This community includes state educational agencies (SEAs), local educational agencies (LEAs), school communities, teachers and leaders, families, and community representatives. It is this pillar, “parent, family, and community engagement,” that Partners for aims to support and strengthen.

E ngagement is essential for equity. ESSA puts state and local authorities front and center in shaping education policy and imbues SEAs and LEAs with greater responsibility for ensuring educational excellence and equity. The statutory language of ESSA* requires SEAs and LEAs to consult and engage with stakeholders on a wide range of specific issues, and presumes that state and local leaders have the resources and motivation to undertake meaningful and ongoing conversations with a broad and diverse set of stakeholders on a variety of issues.

Historically, however, there have been only very limited federal incentives and resources to support meaningful and ongoing conversations about educational policy among SEAs, LEAs and local stakeholders. Faced with a mandate to engage, but with no additional federal funding, guidance, or technical expertise to support that engagement, state agencies and local officials have too often undertaken “one and done” events focused on the distribution of information rather than earnest consultation, and on the culling of input from only a small group of familiar stakeholders and advisors on discrete policy items.

There is currently a great deal of variation among states as to how they plan to implement ESSA’s requirements for meaningful consultation. States also have very different plans for transparently using feedback from stakeholder groups to continuously inform and update implementation efforts in ways that are both timely and uniquely responsive to local needs.

We are too familiar with what happens when sweeping policies are designed to move quickly and without meaningful stakeholder consultation: unproductive protest in the public arena; zero-sum debates that do not draw upon accurate data and are inattentive to shared understandings; disagreements that focus primarily on ad hominem attacks and not evidence-based practices; unmet opportunities for collaborative, ongoing and constructive engagement on the issues.

*ESSA’s Engagement requirements are noted in our rubric, page 22. For more, please see our summary of the requirements.
RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

WHY PROCESS MATTERS (CONT.)

The recent history of pushback against the common core standards is a clear reminder of what can happen when constituents feel that changes are being imposed on them by external forces and:

- They have not been given the opportunity to meaningfully participate in the conversation;
- It is unclear that their voices are being heard and that their voices matter; and/or
- They do not fully or accurately grasp the practical and personal implications of statewide or national changes in education policy.

To be meaningfully consulted, many community members, including parents and guardians, must first be supported and encouraged to improve their understanding of the shared challenges of educational equity. SEAs and LEAs will need to affirmatively help build capacity for engagement in local communities, and work with local stakeholders to identify useful background information, develop preliminary thoughts about key decision points and implications for program resource allocation, and follow through on tough decisions, including on assessment, accountability, and implementation.

US ED is readying to approve the first consolidated state plans submitted by SEAs, ushering in the full-fledged implementation of ESSA.

Going forward, US ED has an important role to play in communicating clear and consistent standards for compliance with the statutory language of ESSA, and needs to give states enough time to consult with their stakeholders on how best to revise their plans, policies, and practices to better meet these standards. This will help to ensure that SEAs are attentive to federal “guardrails” for the protection of vulnerable and underserved groups as they revise and update state policies to more meaningfully reflect the interests and priorities of increasingly diverse state and local constituencies.

STATE LEADERS

Moving forward, state leaders will need to consider the strengths and weaknesses of their plans for stakeholder engagement and clarify where and how to support districts and schools in their own engagement efforts. Some states have already started this work, and advocates are helping to inform and extend these efforts.
LEAs and community-based organizations will need to collaborate in a meaningful and ongoing fashion with members of their educational community. This consultation will help to support needed reform and innovation to improve outcomes for all students.

Coming Soon: Supporting Local Engagement

To support local engagement efforts in all states, Partners for and the Council of Chief State School Officers, in coordination with other advocates and leaders, are working to develop a two-part Handbook for Meaningful Local Engagement.

SEE PAGE 60-61 FOR A LIST OF RESOURCES that support the development, evaluation and implementation of consolidated ESSA state plans.
PART 2:
WHAT WE LEARNED FROM THE STATES
The advancement of equity and excellence under ESSA depends on the ability of states, districts, and schools to build, strengthen, and sustain stakeholder engagement throughout planning, transition, and implementation. True transformation requires staffing and resources, long-term investment and accountability, and a strongly held commitment to an iterative process of collective inquiry and reflection. In our review of consolidated ESSA state plans, we found five basic types of promising practices:


PRIORITIZE UNDERSERVED GROUPS

2. SHOW YOUR WORK

PRIORITIZE TRANSPARENCY IN ONGOING ENGAGEMENT/EFFORTS

3. SHOW SOME GRIT

MAKE DELIBERATE EFFORTS FOR CONTINUED STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK: ASSIGN SPECIFIC STAFF AND ADVISORY COMMITTEES TO SUPPORT STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT GOING FORWARD

4. MAXIMIZE YOUR RESOURCES

LEVERAGE EXTERNAL PARTNERS TO AMPLIFY STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

5. DOUBLE DOWN

PRIORITIZE EQUITY VIA SEPARATION OF POWERS AND PARALLEL PROCESSES

PRIORITIZE UNDERSERVED GROUPS

PRIORITIZE THE NEEDS OF GROUPS WHO HAVE HISTORICALLY BEEN LEAST ABLE TO MEANINGFULLY PARTICIPATE IN POLICY DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES:
Creating systems that ensure an equitable opportunity for marginalized communities to participate means creating systems that ultimately work better for all stakeholders. This is not only a matter of ensuring that basic services such as translation and interpretation are available at public meetings, that online materials are accessible, and that meetings are held with access to food and childcare. It also means contacting constituents in places close to where they live and where they work, meeting with groups in schools and community centers, and asking others, on a regular and ongoing basis, if additional voices are absent from the discussion and what might be done to support their inclusion.

For example, consulting with parents can mean engaging with the PTA, but it also means meeting with faith-based groups, local community representatives, family and youth groups, civil and human rights organizations, and other student and parent advocacy organizations that may have well-staffed education policy departments.

Promising Practices in the States:

USE DEMOGRAPHIC DATA: After analyzing internal data regarding the demographic profile of respondents to its online surveys, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) made a deliberate effort to refocus its efforts on obtaining input from a broader, more racially and ethnically representative cross-section of its educational stakeholder community. CSDE reached out to community-based and school-based partners to find more locally-based “ambassadors” and created partnerships designed to improve consultation with these groups, particularly in communities with strong ties to places of worship, neighborhood organizations, and local businesses.

VERMONT

**DISTRIBUTE LEADERSHIP:** The Field Input Team (FIT) was a team of teachers, administrators, policy groups, student advocacy groups, and higher education groups convened by the The Vermont Agency of Education (VT-AOE) to advise on stakeholder input in the development of Vermont’s consolidated ESSA plan. VT-AOE used stakeholder input to shape the membership of FIT and to inform its outreach efforts on specific topics. For example, VT-AOE frequently consulted with FIT to determine whether consultation on a specific question required input from a broader community of stakeholders, and to determine which additional, specific groups and individuals should be consulted.

OREGON

**OFFER CARROTS:** As it disburses funds to schools and districts in need of improvement, the Oregon Department of Education has decided to prioritize schools and districts that “demonstrate a commitment to improving schools through partnership, authentic stakeholder engagement and the use of evidence to drive improvement.” This is one element of a broader initiative Oregon is planning in support of meaningful stakeholder engagement as a driver of continuous improvement.

MAINE

**CODIFY VALUES:** The Maine Department of Education has included family and community engagement as a discrete element of the state’s school improvement plans.

FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES see pages 60-61.
FACILITATING A CULTURE OF LEADERSHIP IN UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES: To meaningfully advance the interests of equity, workgroups and advisory committees should not only affirmatively prioritize the interests and needs of historically underserved and underrepresented groups, but ensure a critical mass of individuals from these communities are counted among their leadership. Because these groups may have low representation in the overall population, comparative lack of political influence, and incomplete or imperfect understanding of complex bureaucratic processes, SEAs and LEAs should support the participation of these individuals from both a procedural and substantive perspective. Significant analysis should inform what questions and prompts are informing engagement with specific local constituencies. The clear articulation of where responsibility rests for specific decisions is very important, especially in complex, and often decentralized, systems of governance.

Practically speaking, this means not only giving the general public notice of opportunities to participate in policy development, but specifically prioritizing outreach in these communities. Where better understanding of the process is needed, this means making available information broadly available, in an accessible format, and in a manner tailored to address the needs and interests of underserved communities. This also means working with community-based partners to develop clear and concise timelines, overviews of procedure, and topical overviews to guide their direct participation and to support their submission of feedback.

For additional recommendations for this and other engagement best practices, see our Rubric on page 53.
Partners for Recommendations:

- Ensure that SEAs have received and demonstrably incorporated input on the ESSA state plan from a diverse group of stakeholders, including:
  - Students, parents, and families, including those most underserved;
  - Teachers, principals and other school leaders in underserved communities;
  - Paraprofessionals and specialized instructional support personnel, particularly those that serve underrepresented groups;
  - Community-based and civil/human rights organizations;
  - Early childhood educators and leaders, including childcare professionals in underserved communities;

- Regularly engage with stakeholders to better understand the needs of historically underrepresented and/or underserved constituencies.

- Develop informational materials that are accessible to a broad variety of stakeholders, including speakers of languages other than English and individuals with disabilities.

- Support LEAs and other state and local government officials to engage with stakeholders in ways that provide meaningful and actionable information for underserved communities and schools identified for improvement.

- SEAs should - and must - host meetings and hearings that are accessible to a broad variety of stakeholders, including working parents, speakers of languages other than English and individuals with disabilities.
2. SHOW YOUR WORK

PRIORITIZE TRANSPARENCY

ARTICULATE A PUBLIC, TRANSPARENT, WELL-DEFINED DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IS CRITICAL: Those who are not intimately familiar with the government systems that develop education policy in our states must, if their interests are to be honestly weighed, know how and when to make their voices heard, and where to direct their feedback.

While procedural transparency is advanced somewhat by the sharing of meeting dates and invitee lists, these actions, alone, are insufficient. Just as important—or more—in advancing transparency in decisionmaking is showing how feedback from community members was thoughtfully considered in the making of specific decisions. Providing rationales for policy development that are directly responsive to received feedback can be useful in helping stakeholders to better understand the logic behind these decisions.

Promising Practices in the States:

NEW JERSEY

PROVIDE CONTEXT: The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) made special efforts to clearly communicate to stakeholders that the development of the state’s consolidated ESSA plan was one piece of a broader, ongoing effort around school support and improvement. In the development of the state ESSA plan, NJDOE clearly articulated differences in federal, state, district, and local roles, and highlighted the use of performance data in decision making across these levels. To help build trust around these efforts NJDOE not only co-convened meetings with partner organizations, but also collaborated with these partners in jointly reporting out what had been discussed at the meetings.
BUILD A NETWORK: The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) utilized a “hub and spoke” approach to the development of its consolidated state plan. The “hub” and all “spokes” were stakeholder advisory groups comprised of a mix of representatives from different organizations, CDE, and other governmental officials. While the “spoke” groups were topically focused and responsible for developing and reviewing specific sections of the state plan, the “hub” committee was charged with overseeing the overall development of a draft of the state plan. Membership on the “hub” and “spokes” was informed in part by feedback provided by stakeholders, and while the formal structure of “hub and spoke” has technically ended, the individuals and groups that were involved continue to meet periodically with Colorado’s Commissioner of Education.

COMMUNICATE YOUR DECISIONS CLEARLY: The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), in collaboration with Partners for, produced a series of Readers’ Guides that were released at the same time as each of ISBE’s draft ESSA state plans. These Readers’ Guides identified decisions that needed to be made, presented the decisions in ways that were more easily understandable to local community-level stakeholders, and contextualized the decisions in terms of legal and regulatory requirements. In the time since it submitted the final state plan to US ED, ISBE has produced an updated Readers’ Guide that includes a timeline for the first year of ESSA implementation, with clearly articulated expectations for LEAs and schools. For more information about Illinois, see the Illinois Case Study on page 42.

FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES see pages 60-61.
WHAT WE LEARNED FROM THE STATES

MULTIPLE METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT AND DISCUSSIONS ABOUT WEIGHT: SEAs are often challenged to ascribe relative value to different forms of stakeholder input, such as how heavily to weigh the submission of multiple, identical form letters against more personalized forms of feedback that are fewer in number but more specific in content. Stakeholders often feel unheard and unrepresented in a process when they are unclear about how seriously their input will be taken due to format (e.g. generic web feedback forms), and when they are left to infer from final policy decisions what kind of weight their feedback may have had with respect to the input of others.

States should prioritize the voices of underserved groups. For the purposes of equity and excellence, SEAs are well-served to clearly identify and focus on common themes that appear across feedback submitted by differently situated groups. Specific interests that are clearly shared across demographic sectors, across socioeconomic and political divides, can often provide a blueprint for bipartisan action. One of the states we spoke with noted that they take special notice of specific concerns that are raised in common among the business community, local superintendents, and parents. This state then uses these points of feedback to consult with stakeholders in higher education regarding relevant research and evidence-based approaches that might respond to the concerns raised.
Partners for Recommendations:

- ESSA State Plans should reflect regular consultation with stakeholders to better understand the needs of historically underrepresented and/or underserved constituencies.

- The ESSA state plan development process should be conducted in a transparent fashion and according to a publicly available timeline.

- Commit to meaningful communication around fiscal and policy constraints to the advancement of educational equity in the state as well as ways to address and mitigate or eliminate these constraints.

- Develop a plan to support LEAs, make this plan publicly available and in a format that all stakeholders can access.

- Articulate a plan for the timely collection, interpretation, use, and sharing of relevant data with districts, schools, and local communities.

- Engage with a diverse group of stakeholders around plans to apply for and implement - or not to pursue - federal grant programs or other grants and opportunities.

- Clearly respond to stakeholder feedback and show how it was considered in decisions on discrete matters of educational policy.
ASSIGN SPECIFIC STAFF AND ADVISORY COMMITTEES TO SUPPORT Stakeholder engagement going forward:

This kind of know-how, however, is not typically a matter of broader common knowledge. Most people do not have this level of ease and facility with bureaucratic systems. For these reasons, it is incumbent upon our state educational agencies (SEAs) and our local educational agencies (LEAs) to make a deliberate effort to authentically capture input from as broad a community of educational stakeholders as possible. Key to these efforts are staff specifically charged with organizing outreach to, and responding to feedback from, community members.

Stakeholder advisory committees or workgroups by state government officials to capture input and ideas reflects an investment in authentic and ongoing dialogue with constituents. Designated staff positions, advisory committees and workgroups provide a clear point of access for those families and community members that are otherwise unable to attend regularly scheduled stakeholder outreach events, and also provide the additional benefits of helping to insulate individual stakeholders from retaliation for having unpopular opinions. These are investments in obtaining more granular and actionable feedback from stakeholders, and enable a richer basis of input than the submission of identical form letters or copied online comments.

Promising Practices in the States:

MEANINGFUL ADVISORY GROUP: As did a number of SEAs, the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) convened an Advisory Group and workgroups to aid in the development of its consolidated ESSA plan. While the NDE anticipated these groups would each meet three times, all of the groups, after their initial meetings, communicated that they would need to meet more frequently to advance their work. The Advisory Group met at least thirteen times, and NDE, in response to stakeholder feedback, continued to support the inclusion of new Advisory Group members throughout the process. Even after the submission of its consolidated state plan, NDE continues to reach out to Advisory Group members, both collectively and individually, as a “kitchen cabinet” on a variety of matters.
REDIRECT STAFF: The Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) repurposed a staff position to support parent and community engagement. The scope of the work is to coordinate parent and community engagement efforts across federal and state programs, and to support LEA provision of trauma-informed practices and the delivery of community services for children and families. The position has been filled by someone who worked on the ESSA plan, which may lend itself to consistency and sustainability in future ESSA outreach and engagement efforts.

BUILD CAPACITY THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS: Prior to and during the development of its consolidated state plan, the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) collaborated with the Tennessee Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE), Conexión Américas, superintendents from the Leading Innovation for Tennessee Education (LIFT) group, and the Tennessee Education Research Alliance (the Alliance) on stakeholder engagement and the dissemination of relevant research findings. As TDOE shifts into plan implementation, it is planning an annual education summit to be co-sponsored with SCORE, and is developing a long-term vision to support educator preparation and development in partnership with the Alliance. TDOE is also contemplating a “cohort model” for superintendent support and professional development in coordination with LIFT and other organizations.

FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES see pages 60-61.
EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS: A number of state plans reported fairly robust stakeholder engagement activity during the development of the state plan, but offered less detail for how that engagement will continue after the plan has been approved by US ED and throughout ESSA implementation. While there is nothing in these state plans that indicates current stakeholder engagement efforts are scheduled to slow down or stop, these states also do not identify any statutes or policies, staff, or budgetary allocations to support ongoing stakeholder engagement.

One way to structure ongoing efforts is to identify and address current deficiencies in outreach. While many states have conducted online surveys to gather stakeholder input on discrete policy matters, for example, far fewer have included qualitative feedback into their data analysis. This may include explicitly asking stakeholders whether specific groups or perspectives are missing from the conversation, as well as asking for feedback on how effectively information is being communicated and whether additional, or alternative, means of engagement might be more effective. The shape of stakeholder engagement efforts moving forward may be logically designed from this information.
MOVING FORWARD

Partners for Recommendations:

- Stakeholder advisory groups that are convened by the state should continue to meet and work to inform SEA and LEA practices and the development of education policy going forward.

- Articulate a plan to engage relevant stakeholders at regular intervals to inform and improve ESSA implementation and the development of state and local plans in response to changing conditions (e.g. new data).

- Articulate and make public plans to convene regularly around annual state reporting to US ED.

- Support ongoing stakeholder engagement, including funding, staff, and capacity for material development and distribution.
LEVERAGE EXTERNAL PARTNERS TO AMPLIFY STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT: Meaningful, authentic, ongoing engagement with a diverse set of people and constituent groups can identify not only community-specific areas of concern but also areas of limited capacity within schools, districts, and the SEA. Honest acknowledgement of equity and resource gaps can spur deeper and richer engagement with stakeholders, and can also help to indicate areas where the expertise of state and local groups, including nonprofit and private sector groups, can extend and enrich the capacity of SEAs and LEAs. External partnerships can be a wise investment for state and local educational agencies, who will carry a greater range of formal responsibilities under ESSA, without, in many cases, the benefit of more money to fulfill these obligations.

Promising Practices in the States:

ENLIST HELP: Coming into its ESSA consolidated plan development process, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) already had a rich history of enlisting outside organizations to help on a variety of matters, including programming in districts and program evaluation. Specifically with regard to ESSA, DESE worked with:

» Mass, Inc. on outreach, including early morning “policy breakfasts” with stakeholders across the state; panel discussions and suggestions for how to better use existing data; and recommendations for how to advance equity and excellence under ESSA;

» The Rennie Center on an effort to “crowdsource” new accountability measures via convenings and poster presentations. The Rennie Center organized the meetings, and DESE attended, absorbed input, and provided immediate feedback to attendees.

» Sociedad Latina and a mix of groups, both national, like Education First, and community-based, on obtaining stakeholder feedback on the draft state ESSA plan.
4. MAXIMIZE YOUR RESOURCES

WASHINGTON DC

EXTEND CAPACITY: Washington DC’s “DC Staffing Data Collaborative” program is an initiative of the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), in partnership with LEA leaders. The Staffing Data Collaborative is intended to generate talent management data and insights to drive strategic staffing decisions at the LEA and state levels. This process includes a cross-LEA collaboration with a third-party expert research organization for the collection and review of staffing data including teacher evaluations, retention rates, and the results of teacher surveys. The Collaborative offers state and LEA-level recommendations regarding the recruitment, preparation, development, evaluation, and retention of high-performing staff.

MICHIGAN

TARGET FUNDING: The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) worked with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Steelcase Foundation to support stakeholder engagement activities and improve its consultation with underserved and historically underrepresented communities. MDE has also already convened regional meetings in partnership with several community foundations. Discussions continue as to how to most effectively leverage this kind of outside support, but Michigan’s plan does mark a noteworthy effort to use private funds to improve equity through outreach. Going forward, MDE plans to use these kinds of resources to support regional community outreach such as forums on ESSA transition and implementation planning efforts and to develop technical assistance materials.

FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES see pages 60-61.
ADDRESSING PRIVILEGE AND POWER: Our conversations with stakeholders across several states raised a fear of retaliation as a barrier to their meaningful participation. In a few states, online feedback forms or surveys asked for helpful demographic information, but did so in a fashion—or at a sufficiently granular level of detail—that raised concerns among stakeholders about their anonymity.

As LEAs engage stakeholders during state plan implementation, they will be similarly challenged. While a number of the plans we reviewed clearly identified the benefit of meaningful stakeholder engagement as a driver of equity and excellence in planning and improvement at the LEA level, less clear in many of these plans was how SEAs planned to affirmatively support districts and schools with their stakeholder engagement, particularly in places without a history of robust engagement or where previous engagement efforts had been less than completely effective.

SEAs will need to support LEA consultation with stakeholders from both a substantive and procedural perspective: schools and districts will need support not only for how to engage communities on specific topical areas, but also for how to do so in a way that encourages productive dialogue, provides anonymity for individuals when they desire it, and protects individuals with unpopular or minority opinions.
4. MAXIMIZE YOUR RESOURCES

MOVING FORWARD

Partners for Recommendations:

- Work with external partners, such as philanthropic organizations and institutions of higher education to build capacity for stakeholder engagement by adding resources, staff, and intellectual capital.

- Make arrangements with state and local partners to help provide differentiated support for districts and schools.

- Identify and/or develop resources to support local implementation, including a list of evidence-based strategies to support school improvement and state and local partners that can support local implementation.

- Identify external tools and resources to support self-analysis and root cause determinations by districts and schools.
WHAT WE LEARNED FROM THE STATES

PRIORITIZE EQUITY VIA SEPARATION OF POWERS AND PARALLEL PROCESSES: Particularly in states with significant political divides, it can be beneficial when different entities – e.g., a governor’s office, a state board of education, and a state-based “think tank” – make separate efforts to engage stakeholders on ways to support educational excellence and equity. When these efforts are reported and aggregated, they can serve to surface core issues of bipartisan interest. This kind of multi-layered input can help to clearly identify the distinct roles and comparative strengths of community-based groups and the different branches of state government.

Promising Practices in the States:

PARALLEL PROCESS: In developing its consolidated state ESSA plan, the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) convened a series of community meetings in partnership with New Mexico First. While this process was ongoing, the Learning Alliance of New Mexico (LANM) created a parallel, supplemental process for stakeholder engagement, in partnership with the University of New Mexico Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR), the New Mexico School Superintendents’ Association (NMSSA), and the New Mexico Coalition for Charter Schools (NMCCS).

This parallel process, intended to be supplemental, decentralized, and supportive to PED’s efforts, used a Stakeholder Feedback Toolkit to gather and organize broad, structured input from stakeholders on four main topics: challenging academic content standards; high-quality student academic assessments; teacher accountability; and school accountability. Prior to the submission of the state ESSA plan, LANM and CEPR publicly released an analysis of this data for consideration by state legislators and policymakers. PED’s reports on the NM Rising tour and LANM and CEPR’s analyses contain similarities as well as some thought-provoking differences. Also of note is that LANM translated its supportive materials into four languages, with the support of the community engagement office in the Albuquerque School District.
SEPARATION OF POWERS: Louisiana’s state plan was developed in a very politically charged environment. The separation of powers in the state, and the differing perspectives of those powers, resulted in separate stakeholder engagement processes run by the Governor, by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE), and Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). While this did result in some duplication of process and some newsworthy public disagreements, the process around the development and approval of the state plan enabled conversations that may not otherwise have been politically feasible.

This dialogue, which occurred simultaneously in public forums and in closed, private settings, brought renewed attention to matters of educational equity and excellence in the state, including the need for district-level accountability and data analysis and the possibility of formalizing stakeholder engagement requirements at a local level, requiring engagement among local superintendents and a range of groups, including local chambers of commerce, advocacy organizations, and other stakeholders.

FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES see pages 60-61.
WORKING WITH LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS: The separation of powers in states often lends itself to multiple simultaneous stakeholder engagement efforts. For the purposes of our review, this duplication of efforts does not work inherently in favor of, or against, equity and excellence. However, duplication can work decisively in favor of equity when different cross-sections of the stakeholder community are being engaged at different times and by different actors, when the respective roles and responsibilities of conveners are clearly understood by all participants, and when the questions or prompts are distinct and designed to elicit clear and actionable feedback. It is difficult for stakeholders that are engaged in efforts too narrow in topical scope or that look out over too short a period of time to provide meaningful input that is useful in a broader context. Efforts that are too broad or or vague in topical scope do not often produce specific, actionable, or easily prioritized input.

With this in mind, the nation’s approximately 14,000 local school boards have a key role to play in advancing equity and excellence under ESSA. The attentiveness of these boards to the needs and concerns of a broad cross-section of families has direct implications for the nature, pace, and scope of change at the local level.
Partners for Recommendations:

- Use recommendations from an educational advisory group that is made up of governmental representatives and members from the private sector to help frame public priorities and decisions.

- Identify and use publicly accessible data from multiple sources, and from state and independent information systems, to inform and guide ESSA implementation efforts.

- Ensure that local school board members are included in efforts to build policy expertise among constituents who are unfamiliar with the nuances of education policy.

- Consult with local school board members to ensure their active participation and engagement throughout the development and implementation of state education policy.
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ILLINOIS ESSA PLAN

Illinois leaders seized the opportunity ESSA provided to reaffirm their commitments to an accountability system and to work collaboratively with a broad group of stakeholders, including administrators, educators, students, communities, and advocates.

These commitments were on display as the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) worked diligently with many stakeholder groups, through many forums and pre-existing cross-government outlets, to develop its ESSA plan and align the state’s accountability system, with principles of equity.

AN ITERATIVE DRAFT: ISBE engaged in an iterative state plan drafting process and publicly released three draft plans for comment over the course of six months. This process allowed for broad input and significant collaboration. The first draft plan, released in August 2016, made explicit the state’s commitment to collaboration and consultation.

The public drafts were accompanied by outreach efforts that included: three broad-reaching listening tours at school sites across the state; additional, more accessible materials, translated into Spanish; an online input platform; webinars; and brief, topic-specific flyers. A P-20 Council, run out of the governor’s office, provided advisory support, along with the Illinois Balanced Accountability Models Committee, and technical subcommittees.

Sustaining this kind of enriched, ongoing engagement is key to the advancement of equity and excellence under ESSA in Illinois.

IN THIS CASE STUDY: We will explore how those engagement efforts represent Illinois’ commitment to equity.

“Your feedback is essential as we continue to refine the draft and post it again for your review later in the fall before ultimately bringing it to the Illinois State Board of Education for their vote. Although according to ESSA we are only obligated to post the plan once for 30 days of public comment, we believe that numerous opportunities for comment and dialogue will result in a plan that best exemplifies the values of all Illinois’ stakeholders and that every student is, in fact, provided the best opportunity to succeed.”

- Tony Smith, Ph.D.

State Superintendent of Education
From ISBE’s ESSA Plan DRAFT #1

PLAN DEVELOPMENT: ISBE prioritized engaging as many groups as possible with respect to developing its state plan. ISBE focused some of its efforts specifically on reaching out to underserved groups, and facilitators at public meetings were sensitive to ensuring their voices were at the table. ISBE consulted with other states and various independent, national and state-based non-profit groups to strengthen and extend its capacity for stakeholder engagement.

General support materials provided at these meetings became increasingly specific based on feedback during meetings and received electronically. Broadly accessible summaries of each draft plan were widely distributed throughout the state, and are still being used to support an ongoing series of statewide roundtable conversations on supports and interventions for districts and schools. ISBE relied heavily on partner networks to secure the attendance of a diverse group of stakeholders at convenings, including representatives of, and/or advocates for underserved communities.

Illinois’ P-20 Council (more on the Council below) includes leadership from several groups representing historically under-represented constituents, and the Council’s contributions to the IL ESSA plan were significant.

IMPLEMENTATION: Just this past June, Partners for collaborated with ISBE and a group of Illinois advocacy organizations to co-convene district leaders in Illinois’ highest-need districts, to begin conversations around comprehensive and targeted supports and intervention strategies under ESSA. These statewide and regional meetings not only included district leaders, member associations, and advocacy organizations, but community-based organizations (CBOs) and parent and family representatives as well.

2. SHOW YOUR WORK

PLAN DEVELOPMENT: ISBE worked tirelessly over the course of the iterative drafting process to articulate what they heard from stakeholders and what this would look like in the plan. Here’s a snapshot:

- All meetings were transcribed (listening sessions; workgroup sessions; convenings, etc.). Meeting notes and extensive feedback reports were posted on ISBE’s website, and much of the feedback ISBE received was incorporated - and highlighted - in the state plan to provide members of the public with a clear sense of how the plan was developed, and who participated in that work.

- Readers’ Guides were developed in collaboration with external partners, including Partners for, to explain the contents of the draft state plan and facilitate more meaningful feedback. Additionally, each draft plan identified specific issues requiring stakeholder guidance and direction. For example, ISBE specifically requested input from stakeholders on:
  - The overall composite proficiency level on English language assessments for English learners;
  - How to combine funding streams to support each and every child’s progress through school;
  - The relationship between long-term goals that are ambitious, achievable, and aspirational.
Feedback on Engagement Efforts:

Partners for, in supporting ESSA engagement in Illinois, helped ISBE to show their work and offers this snapshot of a convening of local school and district leaders and advocates:

Invested Leadership – There was consensus among participants that hearing from ISBE directly on ESSA implementation and the state plan drafting process was highly valuable.

- **Recommendations:** Where possible, ISBE should continue to be directly involved in engagement efforts with district leaders and local stakeholders, particularly to promote collaboration among diverse sectors of the education community. This should include State Board staff and/or leadership attendance at regional or local convenings, and more direct access for district leaders to ISBE staff (e.g. via a personal/direct email or phone) for support. Additionally, ISBE should highlight their commitment to ensuring that parents, families, and teachers—particularly for Tier 4 schools—have access to information about the plan and channels for sharing their thoughts, ideas and needs. Participants also recommended that ISBE consider providing similar direct support for state-level policy efforts outside of the implementation of ESSA.

Transparency and Better Technical Packaging – Certain decisions and processes (in this case, student growth modeling) remained unclear following their presentation.

- **Recommendations:** Decisions made at the state level around the student growth and proficiency metrics have to be communicated more clearly to district leaders, as well as all stakeholders. ISBE should invest in communications support to explain decisions around student growth – and other data metrics – more effectively to a wide audience. It would also be useful if ISBE hosted a webinar or other live event to allow stakeholders to have their questions answered, and to support further clarification of similarly complex, yet core topics.

Strategic Expert Participation – “Expert” advocates in the room were highly valuable at table discussions, but focusing on their input via a panel felt less useful to a number of participants.

- **Recommendations:** Content experts should be included in discussions moving forward, and should be used more strategically to provide resources and expertise in a local context. It may also be useful to prioritize better communication with district leaders about the importance of partnerships with, and collaboration among, district and school leadership on the one hand, and research/advocacy organizations on the other. This should include identifying how such collaborations create the opportunity for capacity-building at the school and district levels.

Deeper Content Around Specific Strategies - Many participants wanted more information about “braided funds,” a key strategy in the state plan, and increased sensitivity to the importance of supporting groups of students whose interests are not well represented in conversations about consolidation.

- **Recommendations:** State-level expectations for funding must be highly transparent. Additionally, stakeholder input on how to most effectively “braid” funds to best support students will be essential. The implementation of funding strategies is often administratively complex. It is often challenging to effectively communicate the nuances of these strategies to local communities. For this reason, there should be an explicit state-level effort to include district representatives in funding workshops for local staff.
3. SHOW SOME GRIT

**PLAN DEVELOPMENT:** ISBE developed three versions of the state plan for feedback. All of these versions were accompanied by prompts for feedback on specific issues. ISBE worked with partners to develop an online platform to receive input on the draft state plan and to share relevant materials.

Staffing capacity was low but ISBE still dedicated two staff members specifically to engagement planning and outreach. Relevant ISBE staff were tapped to contribute to policy specific conversations (English learners (Els), school improvement, etc.). Advisory committees were utilized to provide stakeholder input on specific topics including on issues related to early learning (Early Learning Council); ELs (Latino Policy Forum); teaching and leading (P-20 Council); accountability (P-20 Council, IBAM committee, Technical Steering Committee, and others)

**IMPLEMENTATION:** ISBE and Partners for put a structure in place for deliberate and ongoing engagement around school improvement and to support implementation through a planned series of statewide, regional, and local convenings.

To support this work and make the engagement relevant, the Consolidated State ESSA Plan for Illinois was significantly repackaged to include clear timelines and roadmaps for the upcoming school year, which is the “Transition to ESSA” year.

During the Transition Year, ISBE continues to engage with LEAs and school leaders around state level decision-making and the development of associated resources and tools for local implementation. This ongoing engagement will ensure local agencies are prepared to meet the policy and engagement requirements of ESSA, in keeping with Illinois’ consolidated state plan, as written and approved.

4. MAXIMIZE YOUR RESOURCES

*Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)*

- Worked with state partners covering a variety of constituent groups (CBOs, advocacy organizations, technical assistance providers, etc.) to support planning and execution of engagement efforts while drawing on the background knowledge and experiences of these groups to help conceptualize appropriate convening topics and areas of focus.

- Relied heavily on partner networks to secure attendance of a diverse group of stakeholders at convenings and incorporated significant feedback from external partners in meeting materials and supplements.

- Used input from key partner organizations to improve the draft plans, particularly around English learner supports, early childhood education, student growth options, the accountability system, the development of a “Whole Child” strategy, and district/school supports and interventions.
4. MAXIMIZE YOUR RESOURCES (CONT.)

**United Way of Illinois**

- **Who are they?** United Way of Illinois is an association of United Way organizations representing communities across Illinois. They monitor government activity, review legislation, and educate both the public and public officials about the need for and impact of human services in local communities.

- **How did they work to engage around ESSA in Illinois?** United Way advocates for public policies that expand opportunities for children and students, and co-convened meetings with Partners for and others about supports and interventions for Illinois schools under ESSA. These meetings brought together:
  - District and school leaders representing every region in the state
  - Advocacy organizations
  - Community based organizations
  - Technical assistance providers
  - Regional education centers
  - Member associations including unions, school boards
  - Parents/parent representatives (COFI, PTA)

**The Center for Tax and Budget Accountability (CTBA)**

- **Who are they?** A bipartisan, nonprofit, research and advocacy think tank that works across ideological lines to promote social and economic justice for everyone, from traditionally disadvantaged populations to the middle class.

- **How did they work to engage around ESSA in Illinois?** CTBA co-convened meetings with Partners for and others about supports and interventions for Illinois schools under ESSA. CTBA also serves as a strategic advisor on legislative and policy implementation in the fields of education, fiscal policy, economic development, and pension policies.

**Latino Policy Forum**

- **Who are they?** The Latino Policy Forum is the only organization in the Chicago area that facilitates the involvement of Latinos at all levels of public decision-making. The Latino Policy Forum strives to improve education outcomes, advocate for affordable housing, promote just immigration policies, and engage diverse sectors of the community. It does this by conducting analysis to inform, influence, and lead, all with an understanding that advancing Latinos advances a shared future.

- **How did they work to engage around ESSA in Illinois?** The Latino Policy Forum has a laser focus on interpreting, educating, and advising about how ESSA must be leveraged to ensure English proficiency is addressed in two specific ways within systems of accountability: as part of the state’s long-term and interim goals, and as part of an annual system that meaningfully differentiates schools.
4. MAXIMIZE YOUR RESOURCES (CONT.)

Teach Plus Illinois

- **Who are they?** Since 2012, more than 250 highly effective teachers throughout Illinois have taken part in Teach Plus’s innovative policy and practice programs that empower teachers to impact education policy and improve teacher instruction.

- **How did they work to engage around ESSA in Illinois?**
  - Teach Plus produced several materials and engaged their own teaching fellows with a high-level policy brief that reinforced ISBE’s orientation toward stakeholder engagement
  - Twenty fellows engaged with 347 of their peers to obtain feedback that led to the *Expediting ESSA* brief
  - Teach Plus Illinois shared Illinois’ teacher views on indicators of school quality and Title II and submitted multiple letters to ISBE in response to the drafts of the plan
  - A Teach Plus fellow moderated an Education Legislative panel on ESSA featuring State Superintendent Tony Smith and Ryan Smith from Education Trust-West; two fellows served on ISBE working groups to develop K-2 and 3-8 indicators; eleven fellows testified at sessions of ISBE’s Listening Tours.

Illinois Federation of Community Schools

- **Who are they?** The Federation is a state-wide community school network that serves to amplify the voice and ability of community schools.

- **How did they work to engage around ESSA in Illinois?** Pulling from the work and priorities of its 1500+ members, the Federation engaged in ISBE’s ESSA plan development process by organizing stakeholders to share their feedback at ISBE listening tour sessions, by providing input on the draft plans and by participating on subcommittees and workgroups. The Federation also worked to advocate for and support school/community/family partnerships, particularly in developing the state plan, and ultimately in developing individual district plans and school improvement plans.
5. DOUBLE DOWN

As described, Illinois and ISBE made successful and repeated use of input from existing advisory boards, including the multi-sector P-20 Council and the Illinois Balanced Accountability Measure (IBAM) group. Here’s how:

**The “Student Growth Model Project”**

- **What was it?** Even before the ESSA drafting process began in summer 2016, ISBE and Illinois stakeholders agreed to prioritize academic growth in measuring the success of schools. Public comment affirmed the importance of growth as the predominant measure within the required accountability indicators in ESSA. Accordingly, Illinois committed to an accountability system with measures of academic attainment and growth, designed both to celebrate student growth and to assist in the identification of supports for schools.

- **What was it?** The technical details of how to implement a growth model were guided by a Technical Steering Council (TSC) composed of a diverse set of stakeholders. The cross-section of experts included the Illinois Balanced Accountability Measure Committee (IBAMC), CTBA, the Management Alliance, and the Illinois teachers unions.

- **What’s next?** The resulting plan demonstrated that ISBE and local education advocates, through the collaborative efforts of a broad cross-section of leaders and stakeholders, could reach consensus in designing an accountability system that maintained a strong commitment to accountability for student progress, without diluting its focus on educational equity. ISBE has also articulated that as part of a continuous improvement process, subsequent implementation of the plan would reveal areas of additional refinement and change, with particular attention to decision points where advocates and policymakers had previously disagreed.

**P-20 Council**

- **Who are they?** The 30-member Council, appointed by the Governor, includes business leaders, teachers, union leaders, faculty, school board members, parents, and representatives of private colleges, universities, community colleges, foundations, and state education and workforce agencies. Four legislators are appointed to the Council by the Illinois House and Senate majority and minority leaders.

- **How did they work to engage around ESSA in Illinois?** With dedicated state support and some from the Illinois philanthropic community, including the Joyce Foundation and the Stone Foundation. The council, through designated sub-committees, convened 18 times from September 2016 through January 2017 to provide substantive input on the Illinois ESSA plan.
MOVING FORWARD

ROOM FOR GROWTH

• The implementation phase, in any policy change, is critically important. These efforts were not clearly signaled in the text of the state plan, and ISBE may want to consider more publicly articulating how it plans to continue engaging stakeholders throughout the implementation of the state plan and identifying any existing or proposed statutes or policies, staff, or budgetary allocations that will support these efforts.

• As ISBE develops more reliable data and determines new measures of interim progress, it will be important to ensure that the chosen goals and measures offer actionable information, that the data is publicly available, and that ISBE regularly convenes stakeholders around equity and ESSA.

• Going forward, ISBE should more directly and transparently engage with legislative leaders and education committee chairs around ESSA.

• ISBE should continue to collaborate with external partners to support this work.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

• Illinois ESSA Equity Dashboard (Alliance for Excellent Education | June 2017)
WHAT WE DID AND WHY: ILLINOIS CASE STUDY

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN ILLINOIS:
ISBE ESSA Plan Drafting Process

**Engagement Prior to Drafting**
- Listening Tour I (11 locations around the state)
- Informational Webinar (implications for Equity)
- Materials and Resources (Slides, Briefs, Social Media, Newsletter)
- ESSA-specific webpage
- P-20 Council Meetings

**SEA Handbook**
Materials Distribution: Partners for’s state guide to engagement

**Student Growth Modeling Project**
Technical Steering Committee to provide evidence to make decisions about how to measure student growth

**ISBE Listening Tour II & 6 Wks Open Comment**
15 sessions held around the state, co-facilitated with local partners

**Meetings with Stakeholders, P-20 Council Workgroup on ESSA Begin**

**Draft 1 & Readers’ Guide**

**Draft 2 & Readers’ Guide**

**P-20 Council Meeting**

**ISBE Listening Tour III & 6 Wks Open Comment**
8 evening sessions held in 8 districts around the state, co-facilitated with local partners

**Meetings with Stakeholders**
ISBE held over 100 meetings with stakeholders in 2016, including students, families, district and school leaders, over 50 CBOs, and more

**Engage for Schools**
Online Platform for input, questions, and engagement with Drafts 2 and 3 leaders, over 50 CBOs, and more

**Advisory Support**
P-20 Council, IBAMC, and others

**LEA Guidance**
Materials Distribution: Partners for’s guide to engagement for district and school leaders

& Partners for Convening: Support and Improvement

**Draft 3**

**Draft 4: Board Approved**

**Governor’s Office 30-Day Review**

**Draft 1 & Readers’ Guide**

**Draft 1 & Readers’ Guide**

**Ongoing Engagement**

**Final to US ED**
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN ILLINOIS:
Sample List of stakeholders to Engage in Illinois

Civil Rights Organizations
- Latino Policy forum
- Chicago Urban League
- Access Living
- Community Renewal Society
- Fight Crime: Invest in Kids
- Jewish Council on Urban Affairs

Educators
- Illinois Education Association
- Illinois Federation of Teachers
- Chicago Teachers Union
- Cook County College Teachers Union

Philanthropy
- Spencer Foundation
- Land of Lincoln Community Foundation
- Woods Fund
- Stone Foundation
- Joyce Foundation
- McCormick Foundation

Research/HIGHER Ed
- University of Chicago
- University of Illinois @ Urbana Champaign
- Concordia University Chicago
- Faith-Based Organizations
- Apostolic Church of God

Professional Associations
- Illinois Association of School Boards
- Illinois Association of School Business Officials
- Illinois Board of Higher Education
- Illinois Federation of Community Schools
- Large Unit District Association
- Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools
- Illinois Association of School Administrators

Advocacy
- Center for Tax and Budget Accountability
- Consortium for Educational Change
- Ounce of Prevention
- Kenwood Oakland Community Organization
- Advance Illinois
- The Grassroots Collaborative
- Illinois P-20 Council
- ED-RED
- United Way of Sangamon County
- Voices for Illinois Children
- Southwest Organizing Project
- Peoria Pathways
- Raise Your Hand
- Sangamon City Continuum of Learning
- Partnership for Resilience
- 30 Million Word Project
- Action for Children
- Catalyst Chicago

Elected Officials, Local & State Agencies
- Illinois State Board of Education
- Legislative Staff
- School Board Members
- Governor’s Office

Business Community
- Illinois Chapter of American Pediatrics
- Taxpayers Federation of Illinois
- Business & Professional People for the Public Interest
- Drinker Biddle & Reath, LLP
- Chicago Community Trust
- Management Alliance

Additional Groups to Include
- Student groups
- Family groups/organizations
OUR RUBRIC:
HOW WE ASSESSED MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT
HOW WE ASSESSED MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

The advancement of equity and excellence in our education system depends on meaningful and ongoing interaction among a broad range of education stakeholders, including State Boards of Education and SEAs, state legislators, district leadership (referred to below as LEAs), school communities, teachers and leaders, families, and community representatives.

The assessment below is intended to help identify SEA areas of strength and areas for improvement around stakeholder engagement during ESSA Plan development.

CROSS-GOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION AND POLICY ENVIRONMENT

A. SEA Is Collaborating With Other Governmental Agencies

1. Collaboration and/or consultation on the development of the state plan with:
   - 1a. Governor or appropriate officials from the Governor’s Office
   - 1b. Members of the state legislature
   - 1c. Members of the state board of education
   - 1d. Local Education Agencies (LEAs)
   - 1e. Representatives of Indian tribes

2. Creation of an educational advisory group composed of governmental and non-governmental members

3. Collaboration with the Governor’s office and/or legislative bodies to ensure dedicated, sustainable sources of funding in support of evidence-based equity policies, including legislative measures, state initiatives, and innovative government-led approaches

B. State Has High Capacity for Engagement

1. Dedicated resources for stakeholder engagement:
   - 1a. Funding stream(s) dedicated to engagement efforts
   - 1b. Staff dedicated to supporting meaningful engagement efforts
   - 1c. Capacity for material development and distribution (e.g. robust website presence dedicated to ESSA)

2. Regular consultation with national, state, and community organizations to better understand the needs of historically underrepresented and/or underserved constituencies

3. There are gubernatorial and/or legislative committees devoted to education from early childhood education through post-secondary education

4. Engagement efforts are codified in education code or state policy

5. Effective communication with stakeholders and legislative bodies around constraints to educational equity efforts in the state and avenues for changing these constraints
### SUPPORTS FOR LEA IMPLEMENTATION

#### A. District and School Leaders Are Engaged

1. Support for LEA understanding of local requirements under ESSA, especially for those LEAs that are likely to be identified under the accountability system
2. Material and technical support for LEA participation in state decision-making and plan development
3. Material, guidance, and technical support for LEA requirements pertaining to stakeholder/community engagement, including parents and families

#### B. Strategies Have Been Developed for Review and Approval of LEA Plans

1. An LEA plan review and approval process that includes assessment of:
   - 1a. Collection and use of data
   - 1b. Alignment with the specific needs of the LEA
   - 1c. Alignment with SEA strategies and goals
   - 1d. Compliance with the tribal consultation requirements for affected LEAs
2. Differentiated review and approval of activities in LEA plans based on statutory and regulatory requirements and the unique needs of LEAs
3. Communication of a determined, reasonable timeline by which the SEA will:
   - 3a. Provide LEAs with resources for plan development;
   - 3b. Allow for local engagement of stakeholders (including families and parents); and
   - 3c. Review LEA plans
4. Engagement with LEAs on efficient use of state and federal funds, and, where appropriate, new or pilot grant opportunities provided by ESSA

#### C. Technical Assistance for Districts, Schools, and Practitioners is Meaningful and Differentiated

1. Engagement with state and local partners to assist in providing differentiated assistance to LEAs
2. Differentiated technical assistance to LEAs and schools does/will support effective implementation of SEA, LEA, and other sub-grantee (practitioner) strategies and is developed and delivered according to statute
3. Differentiated technical assistance strategies, supports or range of supports, and timelines based on the unique needs of LEAs in differing circumstances
4. Technical assistance has been/will be provided that is supported by evidence that the outlined strategies increase student academic achievement
5. To support LEA compliance, assistance has been/will be provided to LEAs regarding the statutory requirements for LEAs, including:
   - 5a. effective transitions for students
   - 5b. meaningful engagement with families
   - 5c. service to homeless children and youth
   - 5d. use of funds to support early learning, teaching and leading (Title II, Part A), English language acquisition and enhancement, and subgrants for student enrichment and support (Title IV, A)
6. Strong and stable mechanisms to support LEAs in their efforts, including timely data sharing and tools and resources for self-analysis and root cause determinations
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A. A Diverse Group of Stakeholders is Engaged

Meaningful engagement - including coordination, collaboration, and/or consultation - with a broad range of stakeholders in the development of the state plan and decisions made under ESSA:

1. Teachers, including those at all levels of experience
2. Principals and other school leaders, including those at all levels of experience
3. Paraprofessionals and specialized instructional support personnel
4. Organizations representing educators
5. Charter school leaders (if applicable)
6. Parents and families, including those representing:
   - 6a. Students with disabilities
   - 6b. English learners
   - 6c. Foster youth and students experiencing homelessness
   - 6d. Students from low-income families
   - 6e. Students belonging to all identified racial/ethnic subgroups
   - 6f. Indian tribes
   - 6g. Other historically underserved students
7. Community-based and civil rights organizations, including those representing:
   - 7a. Students with disabilities
   - 7b. English learners
   - 7c. Foster youth and students experiencing homelessness
   - 7d. Students from low-income families
   - 7e. Students belonging to all identified racial/ethnic subgroups
   - 7f. Indian tribes
   - 7g. Other historically underserved students
8. Grant-making or philanthropic organizations
9. Higher education institutions and the research community
10. Employers and the business community
11. Representatives of private educational institutions and private school students
12. Early childhood educators and leaders
13. Members of the public
14. Representatives of the above groups with varied levels of expertise, who are geographically diverse

B. Mechanisms of Engagement are Accessible and Include Diverse Groups of Stakeholders

1. A minimum of 30 days for public review and input on the state plan that the SEA intends to submit
2. Processes and procedures for developing and adopting the consolidated state plan and individual program plans that have been made publicly available and accessible to all stakeholders - including whether and how stakeholders are allowed the opportunity to engage at different times and levels of policy development
3. Ongoing employment of strategies that ensure meetings or hearings are accessible to a broad variety of stakeholders [e.g., meetings or hearings held at varying times of day (including after school-hours to support educator participation) and in varying locations across the state, with accommodations and supports provided to those who needed them, and childcare made available so families can attend]
4. Steps taken to ensure that all materials - including the consolidated state plan and state report cards - are written and distributed in a way that is easily understood and accessible to a diverse set of stakeholders, including parents and families, and in languages other than English, where appropriate.

5. Efforts made to consult with stakeholders who have expertise specific to each of the components of the state plan, and to educators of students with disabilities, English learners, and other subgroups of students identified under ESSA, and their expertise been weighted appropriately in making determinations.

6. Clarity on how stakeholder feedback is incorporated, on which issues, and why.

7. A process for soliciting input that is likely to result in timely and meaningful feedback.

### ENGAGEMENT AROUND SPECIFIC ISSUES AND PROGRAMS

#### A. SEA Engages Around the Issues

Engagement with a diverse group of stakeholders (including those required under ESSA) during the design and development of the following state plan components:

- Accountability systems/indicators (including “N-size”)
- Supporting excellent educators; Teacher and leader quality
- Supports and Interventions
- Pilot programs or innovation grants (see 4.B for specific programs and grants)
- Data reporting; report cards: format and substance
- Academic assessments, including development of assessments in languages other than English
- Supports for English Language Learners
- Charter schools
- Supports for foster and homeless youth
- “Whole child” strategy and/or “21st Century Learning Centers”
- Early childhood education

#### B. SEA Engages Around Programs and Specific Grants

Outreach to, and input solicited from, the required stakeholders around plans to implement - or not to implement - and execute the following programs and grants; and support for LEAs for local engagement on implementation of the following programs, where appropriate:

**TITLE I**

1. Assessment System Audit
2. Innovative Assessment and Accountability Demonstration Authority
3. Flexibility for Equitable Per-Pupil Funding (LEA)

**TITLE II**

4. Formula Grants to the SEA
5. Subgrants to LEAs

**TITLE III**

6. English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement
7. Subgrants to Eligible Entities
8. National Professional Development Project

**TITLE IV**

9. LEA Applications
10. State Application
11. Promise Neighborhoods
12. Full Service Community Schools
13. Programs for Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native Students
CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

A. Implementation Includes Continuous Improvement Strategies

1. Implementation of strategies that draw from best practices for promoting continuous improvement, such as feedback loops, collection of information about implementation and steps to implement necessary changes, methods of analysis to examine effectiveness and reflect on outcomes, and the identification of challenges and potential solutions
2. The SEA has worked with NGOs and/or CBOs to form a stakeholder communications advisory group that continuously advises the state on its stakeholder engagement efforts.
3. Development of a timeline for continuous improvement at the state and local levels that is ambitious and actionable
4. A plan to engage relevant stakeholders at regular intervals to improve implementation
5. A plan for how the SEA will monitor and update the state and local plans in response to changing conditions
6. A plan for how the SEA will partner with community-based organizations to effectively support continuous improvement at the local level
7. Data and information systems exist for tracking attendance at public events and for organizing stakeholder feedback
8. Use of information gathered from engagement efforts to improve the effectiveness of future efforts

B. Goals and Measurements of Interim Progress Provide Meaningful and Actionable Information

1. Academic Achievement: Goals and measurements of interim progress provide meaningful and actionable information to educators and school leaders, families, public officials, and other stakeholders to ensure all students are college- and career-ready by the time they graduate from high school
2. Graduation Rates (Extended Year Adjusted Cohort): Goals and measurements of interim progress provide meaningful and actionable information to educators and school leaders, families, public officials, and other stakeholders to ensure all students graduate from high school and will be prepared for college and career
3. English Learners: Goals and measurements of interim progress provide meaningful and actionable information to educators, families, public officials, and other stakeholders to ensure all English learners make sufficient progress toward achieving English language proficiency (ELP)

C. Plans for Evaluation of Implementation at the State and Local Level Are in Place

1. A plan to evaluate SEA and LEA implementation of included programs to ensure compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements
2. A description of the data it will use to continuously review, evaluate, and improve both the SEA and the LEA plans and implementation of those plans, including whether it will use input from stakeholders and data collected and publicly reported
3. A description of how the SEA will collect and use data and information to assess the quality of implementation of strategies outlined in state and local plans, and progress toward meeting the desired program outcomes (including in special programs, such as the Innovative Assessment Pilot)
4. The SEA's evaluation plan is supported by evidence that the outlined strategies support student academic achievement for all students, including subgroups of students as defined under ESSA
5. A commitment to convene regularly around annual state reporting to US ED
6. A timeline for monitoring that is ambitious and actionable based upon the anticipated availability of the data and information the SEA proposes to collect
7. The evaluation plan is responsive to the context of the state (e.g., the academic calendar, number of LEAs, and geography of the state)
8. Differentiated evaluation based on LEA-specific factors (e.g., performance, history of non-compliance, size, federal allocation)
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF STATE PLANS

ESSA Plan Review Rubric: An Independent Review of ESSA State Plans (Bellwether Education Partners | June 2017)

Trends in ESSA State Plans (The Education Trust | April 2017)

ESSA and Personalized Learning: State by State (KnowledgeWorks | June 2017)

ESSA & Students with Disabilities (The Advocacy Institute | June 2017)

ESSA Educator Equity Analyses (National Council on Teacher Quality | June 2017)

ESSA in Your State (Alliance For Excellent Education | June 2017)

ESSA STATE PLANS & STATE RESOURCES:

Arizona  Illinois  New Jersey  Vermont
Colorado  Maine  New Mexico  Washington, D.C.
Connecticut  Massachusetts  North Dakota
Delaware  Michigan  Oregon
Louisiana  Nevada  Tennessee

1. REACH THE UNREACHED, THE LEFT BEHIND, AND LEFT OUT

Advancing Equity through ESSA: Strategies for State Leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers and the Aspen Institute | October 2016)

Strong Voices Advocating for Equity and Achievement (Students Can’t Wait | 2016)

Moving Toward Equity: Stakeholder Engagement Guide (Center on Great Teachers & Leaders at the American Institute for Research | January 2015)

2. SHOW YOUR WORK

Seven Questions Boards Should Ask About Their ESSA State Plans (National Association of State Boards of Education | March 2017)

ESSA State Plan Review Guide & Advocacy Tips (The Advocacy Institute | June 2017)

Opportunities to Make Data Work for Students in ESSA (Data Quality Campaign | October 2016)

Advocating on ESSA: Promising Practices for State Planning and Implementation (PIE Network | June 2016)
3. SHOW SOME GRIT

Collaborative Stakeholder Engagement (Education Commission of the States | June 2016)

Stakeholder Engagement Toolkits (Community Tool Box | 2016)

Stakeholder Input for ESSA Plan Development (National Down Syndrome Congress | June 2017)


4. MAXIMIZE YOUR RESOURCES

A Handbook for Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement: A Tool for SEAs (Partners for Each and Every Child | July 2016)

A Guide for Leaders Who Want to Use New Funding Flexibility in ESSA (Chiefs for Change | April 2016)

Stakeholder Engagement in ESSA: “People Support What They Help Create” (Institute for Educational Leadership and the Coalition for Community Schools | 2016)

5. DOUBLE DOWN

Let’s Get This Conversation Started: Strategies, Tools, Examples and Resources to Help States Engage with Stakeholders to Develop and Implement their ESSA Plans (Council of Chief State School Officers | June 2016)

Guidelines for SEAs on Engaging Parents (Council of Chief State School Officers, National PTA, Learning Heroes | 2016)

Supports and Interventions in Illinois Schools: Participation, Preparation, and What Comes Next (Partners for Each and Every Child | December 2016)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) New Mexico Stakeholder Input Toolkit (Learning Alliance New Mexico, NMSSA, NMCCS, UNM | September 2016)