Fact Sheets
What is the Every Student Succeeds Act?

- The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) is the United States' national policy for public education from pre-K through grade 12.
- ESSA provides states with funding to support students, teachers, and schools — for things like services for low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities [and/or those with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)].

What’s New in ESSA?

- ESSA gives state and local governments more flexibility to decide how to measure student performance and school quality. For example, ESSA requires that all states adopt “challenging academic standards,” but allows states to choose what those standards will be.
- In exchange for that flexibility, ESSA requires that state and local government leaders engage with their communities to make decisions that best fit their needs.
- ESSA has kept in place many important policies and opportunities that matter to our country as a whole, including tracking how students are doing academically, looking at the gaps in performance among groups of students, and making sure that those who need support receive it.

What is a State ESSA Plan?

- The first decisions under ESSA have happened at the state level, where state leaders engaged with the larger state education community to develop state ESSA plans, which outline how states plan to meet the requirements of the law. These state ESSA plans include:
  - Standards for what children should learn in each grade
  - Assessments for finding out if children have met those standards
  - Long-term goals for schools and students
  - A way to measure if schools are on track to meet those goals
  - A system of support for all schools, especially those that are struggling the most

What Does ESSA Mean for My School?

- Every state’s ESSA plan is required to support schools and districts as they write their own local plans for school improvement and plans for use of federal funds. These local ESSA plans will describe how schools will support students and improve over time.
- In some states, only schools that are identified by the state as lowest performing will be required to submit plans for school improvement. All schools that receive federal funding must submit applications for those funds.
- Under ESSA, all local ESSA plans must be written in consultation with families and communities — called “stakeholder engagement” — and should be designed to support education equity.

Learn more about the new law and your state’s ESSA plan at CheckStatePlans.org

A History of the Law

- ESSA is the current name for an old law: the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA).
- From 2001 until ESSA became law, that same law was called the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB). Every time the name has changed, edits have been made.
- Congress first passed the ESEA in 1965 during the Civil Rights Movement.
- In 1965, this law was the first time the federal government provided comprehensive education funding to states — specifically to support students from low-income families.
- With federal funding came requirements for how to use it, including how to measure school quality.
- Congress has revised those requirements several times, most recently by passing ESSA in December 2015.

This is a Tool from the Engage for Education Equity Toolkit. Find more at partnersforeachandeverychild.org/engageforedequity
School Improvement Under ESSA

Use this handout as a backgrounder for organizers and community members to understand the facts about school improvement under ESSA, and what it means for your school.

State Decisions

- Your state has recently made decisions — written into their state ESSA Plan — about how to evaluate all public schools, including public charter schools. Some states are using a grading system to rate schools, for example, an A-F scale.

Identification of Underperforming Schools

- States are required by law to identify the schools that are “lowest performing,” and schools where subgroups of students are performing at that lowest level or are “consistently underperforming”.
- The law says that your state must categorize these schools as in need of either “Comprehensive Support and Improvement” (CSI), “Targeted Support and Improvement” (TSI), or “Additional Targeted Support and Improvement.” (ATSI) These schools might be “F” schools if the state uses a grading system. If your school is identified as CSI, TSI, or ATSI, the school is required to notify you.

School Improvement

- For all schools, the state is required to describe how the state system of education agencies (districts, regional offices, charter managers, etc.) will support your school with resources. These resources could include:
  - in-person trainings for changes in discipline practices and other topics
  - partnership with an outside consultant or nonprofit organization
  - online materials for teachers and administrators
- All schools, even those that do not receive any federal funding, have budgets that should be driven by local priorities and that support programs that serve school communities. These priorities and programs are called school improvement strategies.
- Depending on how the state evaluates or rates your school, these school improvement strategies are likely limited by requirements set by the state or district. Typically, high-achieving schools have the most flexibility and struggling schools must implement school improvement strategies determined by the state or district.

What is a Tiered System of Support?
Support can mean materials, expert partners, money, training, etc. Sometimes states offer:
- one set of supports to all schools (e.g. a training manual available for download online),
- an additional set for the schools that are below average (e.g. access to a set of training videos), and
- a third, additional set of supports for the schools that are struggling the most (e.g. on-site, in-person training).
This tiered system of support offers different levels of support based on need.

What is Your State’s System?
Find out more about your state’s system of supports for school improvement by checking your state education department’s website or by contacting your school’s leadership team, local school board, or district administrator.

Check out the Organizer’s Packet for more!
### Engagement

- **All school improvement strategies** must be decided and implemented by school and district administrators (e.g. principals) in collaboration with community members (e.g. students, families, teachers, advocates). **This collaboration (engagement) is both required by law and essential for effecting real change for students.** (Check out A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement from the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools for why this works).

- **Engagement** of the whole school community, however, is not possible without resources. **ESSA includes funding for family engagement**, and many programs include engagement as an allowable use of funds. You can help to increase those resources by:
  - Advocating for additional funding and other resources for your school either from your local district or school (write a letter to your school board, attend or demand meetings with district administrators to address funding, partnerships, contracts, and staffing). You can also push for more funding from the state (join other families and advocates working to change your state’s budget or funding formula).
  - Taking a leadership role, either officially (run for office or join your school’s Title I School Site Council) or as a community leader who helps to gather families, host events, connect community partners to the school site, write grant applications, or participate in evaluation efforts (e.g. get the word out about results from a school climate survey).
  - Connecting funding to engagement by working with administrators and community leaders to ensure that engagement is written into grant applications, program strategies, and/or school policy.

### Funding Available

**Title I Parent and Family Engagement Set-Aside**

Each district is required to reserve at least 1 percent of its Title I funds to carry out parent and family engagement activities, including those described in the written policy section below. The law further requires that parents and family members of low-income children must be involved in decisions regarding how these engagement funds are spent. These parent and family engagement funds must be used for at least one of the below activities:

- Supporting programs that reach families at home, in the community, and at school
- Disseminating information on best practices focused on engagement, especially for increasing engagement of economically disadvantaged families
- Giving subgrants to schools to collaborate with community-based organizations or businesses that have a track record of improving family engagement
- Any other activities that the district believes are appropriate to increase engagement

*From The Leadership Conference Education Fund’s ESSA Guide for Advocates (2017)*
Needs Assessments

Use this handout to support a meeting around your local needs assessment, or to help community members begin thinking about information as a tool for action!

What is a Needs Assessment?

- To learn more about what a school needs to better support students, school and district administrators sometimes conduct a “needs assessment.” This is a set of in-depth questions about school environments, teachers and staff, extracurricular programs, coursework, and other information. **Needs Assessments are required** for all schools identified for school improvement under ESSA and are a best practice for all schools wanting to improve.

How do Schools Gather Equity Information?

- There are many ways that school and district officials and administrators gather information about students and the personnel, programs, and policies that support them, including **rubrics, open-ended questions and storytelling, surveys, and in-person conversations**.
- Help your school and school community learn more by collecting and sharing the right information: information should include both outcomes and inputs so that you know both where there is need and what might be able to fill that need.

Key Terms:

**Standards and Curriculum**

Academic **standards** describe outcomes for students: what should students know at the end of 3rd grade? **Curriculum** is a set of inputs: what will the teacher and students do together in order for students to learn the standards?

**Indicators**

**Indicators** are pieces of information about students and schools that let us know how they are doing and are used by the school, district, and state to inform decisions. Under ESSA, some indicators are required, including student performance on tests, but can also be non-academic information like school climate.

**Data**

Indicators are measured through the collection of **data**. Sometimes this data is straightforward, like scores on a test, but often the simplest data is the least useful for understanding not only how students are doing, but what they need in order to do better, like whether kids feel safe in school.

**Student Assessment**

A key component that connects a curriculum to standards is an **assessment** — a test: have students learned what they needed through the curriculum in order to meet the standards?

**Inputs/Outputs**

An **input** is something that contributes to the learning and success of a student, like curriculum, effective teachers, and access to healthcare, arts programs, and extracurricular opportunities. **Outputs** are indications of student success, like scores on a test or responses to a school climate survey.

**School Climate**

**School climate** refers to environment, including whether students are safe, learning, and respected; teachers are supported; and families are actively involved. It is often measured by survey but can also refer to specific measures like student suspension/expulsion rates and/or teacher absences.

For more Key ESSA Terms, check out the **Glossary**.
School Report Cards

Use this handout at a meeting on your school’s report card, along with examples from your state’s education department or school board website!

What is a School Report Card?

- School report cards are similar to your student’s report card, in that they show information about how your school is doing.
- School report cards are based on data and information on students, the teachers and staff that work at your school, and other things about the school’s culture or the opportunities it provides to students.

Where does the information come from?

- States get information from districts and charter programs, who get their data from the schools themselves. If you want better or different information, you’ll need to talk to your state representatives and your school leadership.

Where can I find my school report card?

- School report cards are all hosted online on your state’s education agency website. Search “(your state) school report card” and it will likely be the first link you see.
- You can also call your school or district office and request a printed copy. They are required to provide it!

Who can help me understand my school report card?

- School report cards can be difficult to read. The first step is to find the report card and talk it through with a peer or other trusted advocate.
- Next, go together to meet with a school staff member - either a teacher, school site council member, or your school principal in-person. Ask them to walk you through the information on the report.
- National organizations can also help! Check out Great Schools! at greatschools.org/gk/ratings and the Data Quality Campaign at dataqualitycampaign.org

Want to Know More?

Check out the Data Quality Campaign’s website! dataqualitycampaign.org/showmethedata

There you’ll find information about:

- what states SHOULD be sharing,
- what to advocate for and how, and
- how to read your school’s report card.

You can also find information in Education Data 101

What you learn will help you push for change. Use the information in your school’s report card to empower your voice!

This is a Tool from the Engage for Education Equity Toolkit. Find more at partnersforeachandeverychild.org/engageforedequity
Opportunities to Promote a Positive School Climate in the Every Student Succeeds Act

Use this handout in a meeting on school climate with community members, or to support improved school climate as an ESSA school improvement strategy.

Measures of School Quality (Indicators)

- ESSA requires states to use at least four different measures to determine how schools are performing. These measures are called “accountability indicators” and include test scores and graduation rates.
- States have the option to use school climate as one of the indicators of school quality.
- Selecting school climate as an accountability indicator can help states make sure that unfair discipline practices that target certain groups of students (e.g., students of color) are addressed.
- States can measure the quality of school climate by using discipline data (e.g., how many and which groups of students are suspended every year) and school climate surveys completed by students and parents.
- States that select school climate as an indicator of school quality should develop a definition of positive school climate to incorporate in their state plans.

Supporting Districts

- ESSA requires states to describe how they will support districts to improve conditions for student learning in their state plans.
- This includes reducing:
  - bullying and harassment;
  - school discipline practices that remove students from the classroom; and
  - practices that may threaten students’ health and safety. For example, isolating students from others and physically restraining them.
- States should provide districts with funding and other resources to support them in using alternative discipline strategies, such as restorative practices that help students address conflict in a positive way.

The Dignity in Schools Campaign (dignityinschools.org) envisions an educational system where all schools work toward preventing trauma, repairing harm and promoting healing, and reject a culture of punishment, and criminalization that fuels the school-to-prison pipeline by pushing students out of the classroom and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. In this vision, all schools provide equitable resources — resources like funding, support staff, or positive school discipline interventions. For more, check out their resources: dignityinschools.org/take-action/every-student-succeeds-act-essa/. In particular, check out The Model School Code on Education & Dignity — a set of recommended policies to schools, districts and legislators to help end school pushout and protect the human rights to education, dignity, participation and freedom from discrimination.

This is a Tool from the Engage for Education Equity Toolkit. Find more at partnersforeachandeverychild.org/engageforedequity.
State and District Report Cards

- Every year, states and districts must publish a report card that includes measures of school quality, climate and safety in language parents can understand. Measures of school climate that must be included on the report card include:
  - In- and out-of-school suspensions;
  - Expulsions;
  - School-based arrests;
  - Referrals to law enforcement;
  - Chronic absenteeism (excused and unexcused); and
  - Incidences of violence, including bullying and harassment.

School Improvement

- Schools that are low performing based on the state’s accountability indicators must be identified for Targeted Support and Improvement or Comprehensive Support and Improvement.
- When schools are identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement, the school district must work with community stakeholders to develop and carry out a plan to improve student outcomes.
- This plan must be based on a needs assessment, which identifies additional supports and services that could improve the school.
- Community members can push for the school district to include measures of school climate (e.g. discipline data and school climate surveys) in the needs assessment to determine if supports to reduce practices that push students out of the classroom should be included in the improvement plan.

What is Restorative Justice?
Restorative justice is an approach to discipline that focuses on repairing harm through inclusive processes that engage students and adults in schools.

Addressing Suspension: What is the impact?
“Besides the obvious loss of time in the classroom, suspensions matter because they are among the leading indicators of whether a child will drop out of school, and because out-of-school suspension increases a child’s risk for future incarceration. Given these increased risks, what we don’t know about the use of suspensions may be putting our children’s futures (and our economy) in jeopardy.”

Opportunities Suspended: The Disparate Impact of Disciplinary Exclusion from School
The Civil Rights Project

Schools must also support struggling students by introducing effective positive discipline practices, training teachers and staff to better address disciplinary disruption, and engaging with families and community leaders. When children are struggling, don’t push them out; bring them closer.
Opportunities to Support Early Learning in the Every Student Succeeds Act

Use this handout at a meeting on early learning with community members, or to support early learning as an ESSA school improvement strategy.

ESSA & Early Learning

• High-quality intervention and education that begins in the first five years and is maintained through the early elementary years can combat achievement gaps that might otherwise begin before children enter kindergarten and sustain as they move throughout K-12.

• Under ESSA, several sources of funding can be applied to early learning, including:
  • facilities (classrooms, school spaces)
  • educator development and support
  • innovative learning strategies for English learners and children with disabilities
  • improved data systems for young learners
  • expanded access to high-quality early learning opportunities
  • improved transitions into kindergarten
  • engagement of families and community members (check out Title IV Child-Parent Centers! talk to your principal to get more information)

• Many school districts provide early learning directly, and all districts can partner with local early learning providers to share information about children and families, align standards and expectations, coordinate professional development and supports, and implement systems that support the transition into kindergarten.

Building Bridges from Birth to K-12

• Creating an aligned system of supports for children and families across the early years and grades means supporting families and young children through not only access to childcare and early learning, but also through connection to K-12 public education systems that make sense.

• All families — including those with young children — are affected by ESSA, and therefore all families can and should be involved in the process of improving schools.

More Resources:

• What Early Learning in ESSA Can Look Like for States and Districts from the First Five Years Fund at ffyf.org/resources

• School Improvement Starts Before School and School Improvement: Don’t wait until third grade, blogs by Elliott Regenstein from the Ounce of Prevention Fund. More resources at theounce.org

This is a Tool from the Engage for Education Equity Toolkit. Find more at partnersforachandeverychild.org/engageforedequity
ESSA is organized into eight “Titles,” each containing a set of requirements that states and districts must follow in order to receive the funding that is allocated to each.

The majority of ESSA funding is given from the U.S. Department of Education to states, and the total amount given is determined by Congress each year in the federal budget. Learn more about this process and what funding is available for your school by speaking with your district or charter administrators.

**Title I of ESSA**
The first major chapter of the law, which includes the bulk of funding for school districts and schools and which contains the majority of the law’s accountability and reporting requirements. Title I funding is targeted to serve low-income students.

**Title II of ESSA**
This chapter is focused on teacher quality and support for teachers.

**Title III of ESSA**
This chapter provides funding and requirements related to English learners.

**Title IV of ESSA**
This chapter provides funding and requirements for other areas of student support, including extended learning, afterschool programs, supportive school climate, well-rounded education, charter schools, and magnet schools.

**Title V of ESSA**
This chapter provides additional requirements and limitations of the U.S. Secretary of Education, funding for rural schools, and rules governing the combining of federal funding.

**Title VI of ESSA**
This chapter provides funding and requirements related to American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students.

**Title VII of ESSA**
This chapter provides funding and requirements for the Impact Aid program, which compensates districts for lost [revenue] due to federal lands, and includes requirements for serving youth experiencing homelessness through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

**Title VIII of ESSA**
This chapter includes general requirements which govern the law overall, including which provisions may be waived by the U.S. Department of Education and restrictions on the U.S. Secretary of Education’s authority.

Federal funding (including ESSA) only accounts for about 1/10th of your school’s budget. The rest of the funding that keeps your school doors open comes from state and local funding and funding from grants and donors.

Adapted from The Leadership Conference Education Fund’s ESSA Guide for Advocates (2017)