Equity & The Every Student Succeeds Act: 
The Organizer’s Packet

Core information for organizers to start taking action for school improvement under ESSA
To Begin: A Vision for Our Children

Our school communities have the potential to make sure all children have everything they need to succeed, including:

- **great teachers**, thoughtful school administrators, and other excellent support staff, as well as ongoing training to support continual learning for staff and leadership;

- **support for families**, including parent organizing and leadership, classes, and regular access to the school’s leadership and classrooms;

- **opportunities for high quality learning** for all children, birth through 12th grade;

- **access to nutrition and healthcare**, including healthy meals, physical education and recess, and mental health services;

- **positive discipline practices**, like Restorative Justice practices, reduced suspensions, or reduced presence of police in schools; and

- **advanced and creative coursework**, including implementing a culturally relevant and culturally responsive curriculum, adding courses like arts and civics, or providing internship opportunities.

The *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* is just one tool for us to refocus our efforts to move toward equity and justice for all students: education is a human right!
Who is Part of a School Community?

All leaders — from students to parents, care-givers, and families to advocates to education agencies — should be involved in making your school a place where all children can learn and grow.

The School Community:

Students

Parents, families, care-givers, mentors, and peers

In-school staff, health professionals, and youth program leaders

Community centers, local businesses, health organizations, and programs for families and youth

The Broader Education Community:

Outside of your school community, national, state, and local education governing agencies and advocates are supporting schools and students. Use their resources!

As we talk about families throughout this document, we mean parents, care-givers, guardians, and other family members who are the primary adults in a child’s life.
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**.

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**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.

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Learn more about the new law and your state’s ESSA plan at [CheckStatePlans.org](http://CheckStatePlans.org)
All states have submitted their ESSA plans to the U.S. Department of Education, following two years of working with communities to answer the important questions asked in ESSA. Decisions made by the state will now be implemented at the local level. **What can you expect?**

**April/May 2017 or September/October 2017**
States submitted their ESSA plans.

**By Spring 2018**
U.S. Department of Education reviews and approves ESSA state plans.

**Starting School Year 2017-18**
Schools and districts collect data/information about schools and students. States communicate with the state education community about expectations.

**June 2018 (and each year)**
Districts submit applications for federal funds (e.g. Title I) to the state.

**End of School Year 2018-19**
States identify schools for “Support & Improvement” based on the state rating system.

**Summer 2019**
Schools must communicate their ratings to families/communities.

**School Year 2019-20, ongoing:**

**School Improvement**
Districts and schools engage with their communities and write and implement local improvement or strategic plans.

**Find out More From Your State**
Your state will have more information about when schools will be identified under the law for “Support and Improvement” (lowest performing schools) and what that means for you and your school and district. Find out more in your state’s ESSA Plan and on your state’s website. You can also work with a local organization to learn more!
School Improvement Planning Under ESSA

What Is School Improvement?

→ **School improvement** is the process of learning about a community and working to make it better for all students. **School improvement means student success.**

→ School improvement requires that district and school administrators and communities — including students and families — **work together.**

3 Ways Your School Is Planning for School Improvement

1. **Support and Improvement Plans**

   √ **ESSA Says:** Required for schools identified by the state as low-performing
   √ **Learn More:** Check out your state’s ESSA plan

   Find out if your school has been identified as low performing — called “Comprehensive Support and Improvement,” “Targeted Support and Improvement,” or “Additional Targeted Support and Improvement” schools under ESSA — by checking your school’s report card, starting in Summer 2019. You can find report cards on your state education department’s website.

2. **Funding Applications & Consolidated Local ESSA Plans**

   √ **ESSA Says:** Required by all districts with schools receiving federal funds
   √ **Learn More:** Check out the US ED website: ed.gov/ESSA

3. **Local Strategic Planning**

   √ **ESSA Says:** Not required for all districts or schools in all states
   √ **Learn More:** Check out your state’s ESSA plan or state strategic plan

What this Means for Your School

→ These three processes may be three parts of the same document or be entirely separate efforts. No matter the format, **they should be connected and aligned.**

→ Keep in mind that **school improvement processes are different school to school and district to district,** as well as for charter schools, alternative schools, and schools in “turnaround,” which may include mayor, governor, or other state office involvement.

For more, check out our fact sheet: **School Improvement Under ESSA**
It’s Your Right to Be Involved

What is Stakeholder Engagement?

- Under ESSA, state and local officials are required to engage with community members around decisions that impact schools and students. Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement is a process of communicating, learning, and partnering with school communities that acknowledges the unique needs and strengths of those involved.

What is Equity?

- All students have the right to schools that are safe, healthy and nurturing environments where every student has the opportunity to reach their full potential.
- Some students need more and different resources than others — resources like funding, excellent educators and mentors, positive behavioral support, and opportunities for engagement.
- Equality means that all students get the same resources. Equity means that all students have the resources they need to be successful:

Equality

Equity

Justice: No Barriers

- We must push for schools that promote equity for all students, including low-income students, students of color, English learners, LGBTQ students, and students with disabilities.

Engagement for Equity:

- All community members have the right to take part in decision-making to improve the schools they serve and that serve them. It is essential that local administrators and leaders move away from simply informing stakeholders about decisions, and move toward involving a diverse, inclusive group of school community members in active leadership and decision-making.

For more on engagement, check out What Does an Engaged School Community Look Like?
Getting Involved in School Improvement

These steps are part of every school improvement process. Remember: This is your school community — You can be a part of every step!

1. Learn & Share
   Share Your Story
   Assess Need
   Ask Questions

2. Set Goals
   What Does Success Look Like?

3. Make a Plan
   Decide What Matters Most & Choose The Right Supports

4. Write it Down
   Write it in the School Handbook, Local ESSA Plans, Funding Applications, and Halls of Your School

5. Make it Happen
   Organize Volunteer Work

6. Evaluate
   What Needs to Change?

7. Make Changes to Get Better
   How is it Going?

Check out Examples of meaningful engagement in action from New York, Ohio, and Massachusetts

For a deeper dive with school community members, check out our fact sheet: School Improvement Under
1. Learn and Share
Find out how your school and school community are doing and share that information with your peers and larger community.

Where to Start:

✓ Check out your school’s report card. Report cards are available online and can usually be found on your state education department website. Report cards contain information about your school and district that is collected statewide, like demographic data about students.

✓ Find more information about your district and state online through: the federal Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC); national foundations, like the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Kids Count Data Center; and advocacy groups like the Education Trust and the Dignity in Schools Campaign. You can also submit a Freedom of Information Act, or FOIA, request at foia.gov. This is a way to ask for any public information from your government officials.

✓ Build coalitions and collaborative relationships to build up the community’s voice. This helps to create an environment for sharing.

✓ Help to package and distribute information to families and students: distribute flyers; develop email or social media campaigns; or host a Q&A with your school community.

Add your own action steps:

✓
✓

Moving Forward:

✓ Information should be collected, aggregated, and analyzed regularly. Your school will collect data annually, but that should not limit you. You can affect what information is collected, when, and how to make sure it is useful and accurate by connecting community members with school officials and staff, and by making information digestible. As you advocate for change, advocate for accurate and actionable information!

Include Students!
Remember that in order to best serve students, students themselves must be included in the conversation!

Check out educationdive.com/news/schools-creating-new-structures-to-encourage-student-voice/509849/ for examples of how communities are doing this!

Check out our fact sheet on Needs Assessments for more information about how school leaders “Learn More”!
2. Set Goals

Decide what you want your students and school communities to learn, experience, and achieve

Where to Start:

✓ Look in your state’s ESSA plan for state goals for all students and student subgroups (e.g. low-income students). Help your community understand how these goals apply to your school.

✓ Co-host family input meetings to share the state goals, as well as and the school goals (look for these in your school handbook) and update them to better reflect what the school community wants.

✓ Help community members to turn their broad vision into actionable next steps for a school to take and help school and district administrators connect current data to long-term goals.

✓ Keep your goals simple and easy to communicate.

✓ Help community members articulate their values so that the goals you create together reflect what the community cares about. Again, be sure to include students!

Add your own action steps:

✓

✓

Moving Forward:

✓ Your goals can and should change over time. Support regular meetings to revisit and update your goals to accommodate changes in your school’s performance and the needs of your students.
3. Make a Plan

Find out what programs and services are available to students and communities (in and out of school) and choose strategies that will work based on your goals.

Where to Start:

✓ Learn what strategies are available and relevant to your school community. Organizations like the Intercultural Development Research Association (idra.org), Evidence for ESSA (evidenceforessa.org), the Dignity in Schools Campaign (dignityinschools.org), Understood (understood.org), the Center for Parent Information and Resources (parentcenterhub.org/category/topics/eseaessa), and others can also help!

✓ Work with local community groups and national advocates to build a menu of possible programs and strategies for school improvement, and speak with families, in-school staff, and other community members about their vision for how these programs might work.

✓ Engage directly with school and district administrators to push for the practices and policies you want.

✓ Collaborate with other community organizers to raise funds and implement programs outside of schools (e.g. after school literacy workshop at your local library).

Add your own action steps:

✓

✓

Moving Forward:

✓ While you must give strategies time to be implemented fully and correctly, it is important to also update your plans over time to meet the changing needs of your students. Ask for regular feedback about what’s working and stay informed about new and innovative ideas by continuing to build relationships with advocates, researchers, school staff, and families.

Check out Improve Your School: What to Advocate for for more ideas!
4. Write it Down

Once you have determined which strategies to focus on, seek out and help school and district officials to write down these ideas into action

Where to Start:

✓ Your school community’s goals and priorities, as well as the strategies used to improve, should be written in the places that matter most: funding applications, local strategic plans or school improvement plans (ESSA), and school handbooks or mission statements (like on the school website). Write sample language and meet with school and district officials to make sure this happens!

✓ Help to ensure that priorities match budgets by working with your local school board.

✓ Talk to other families, students, and the school’s leadership to find out what funding is most needed and help school and community leaders secure additional grants for ambitious projects.

✓ Write down the process! Community members that helped to shape the plans will want to see it documented, and new families and community members will see that their voices count!

Add your own action steps:

✓

✓

Moving Forward:

✓ Make sure that policies, vision, and budgets are aligned and updated regularly.

✓ Remember that there are many documents that can be edited to support the goals and describe plans, and that changes should always be documented so that school leaders can be held accountable to their promises.

✓ It can also be helpful to put up flyers or posters inside schools to reinforce values and remind communities of their plans and goals.

For more about what you can affect in writing, check out our resource Improve Your School: Where to “Write it Down”
5. Make it Happen

Recruit and inform community members and work together to implement the programs and strategies that you have chosen.

**Where to Start:**

√ As with every step in this process, **see yourself as an organizer**. Help new community members be a part of the process by sharing what you have done to-date and helping them to see how they can be a part of the process moving forward.

√ **Show up** on school campuses to take tours, talk with students and staff, and to see the school facilities. Help students to know that their community is present and caring.

√ **Volunteer or work at the school site:** Ask your school administrators what would be most helpful or offer your talents directly (e.g. work with a teacher, volunteer as an assistant coach, or help to decorate the teachers’ lounge with relevant literature each month).

√ **Join your school’s leadership teams** like school site councils, stakeholder engagement teams, teacher leadership committees, etc. If a team is full or does not exist, consider creating a peer leadership role for yourself or others to develop a stronger voice and a body ready for action where needed.

√ **Work together.** The strongest coalitions are intersectional - demonstrate solidarity for our human right to education through collective action!

**Add your own action steps:**

√

√

**Moving Forward:**

√ Engagement, like organizing, is not one-and-done. Our students need sustained support to continue to meet their varied and changing needs. **Commit to staying involved** and help others to do the same.


For examples of Meaningful Engagement in Action, read stories of success in New York, Ohio, and Massachusetts.
6. Evaluate
Measure how strategies or programs are working (or not working)

Where to Start:

✓ Find a trusted messenger to give you the information you are looking for. Program leaders (e.g. school nurse, counselor, or social worker) may have the most recent and relevant information about attendance, involvement, and outcomes.

✓ Look at data from multiple months or years to find trends in improvement. Be honest about what is and is not working.

✓ Share out what you learn to other families and community members by making the data easy to understand and present at meetings and events where families, students, and community members can ask questions about it.

Add your own action steps:

✓

✓

7. Make Changes to Get Better
Make efforts over time to change and improve

Where to Start:

✓ Set aside time to visit schools, talk with other students, families, and staff, and make an effort to build your understanding over time.

✓ Organize community meetings to review new information and data and discuss any changes and what improvements are needed, be involved in recruitment efforts for new staff, hold or take part in trainings for existing staff, and keep your community up to date with new research, etc.

✓ Help to connect families and school staff with the right change-makers going forward.

✓ Make sure that it is clear to all community members when and how to engage. Help to connect process to outcomes: show what is working over time and help community members to support those successful efforts.
Find more Resources at partnersforachandeverychild.org/engageforedequity
Parents & Families: Your Community Needs You!

Get Involved in ESSA!

What is ESSA?

- The Every Student Succeeds Act is the United States’ national policy for public education from pre-K through grade 12.

- This law is the main way that the federal government provides education funding to states - specifically to support students from low-income families.

- ESSA also provides states with funding to support students, teachers, and schools [e.g. parent engagement, services for low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities (and/or students with Individualized Education Plans, or IEPs)].

- ALL families can affect what ESSA means for kids by getting involved in school improvement planning!

Now you know!

ESSA replaced the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2015.

A Civil Rights Legacy

ESSA is an updated version (re-authorization) of a law passed during the Civil Rights Movement in 1965. This law, which gives federal funding to schools for children in low-income families, exists today because parents, families, and communities organized to advocate for better support and protection for our nation’s children.

The law began in the living rooms, community centers, churches, and school houses of communities like yours. We hope you will join us to continue the tradition of local involvement in support of our kids.

This is a Tool from the Engage for Education Equity Toolkit. Find more at partnersforachaneeverychild.org/engagedoredequity
Every parent wants the best possible education for their child. Our school communities have the potential to make sure every child has everything they need to succeed: great teachers, principals, and mentors and access to excellent services and educational opportunities.

What You Need to Know About ESSA:

What does ESSA do?

- ESSA is a set of requirements that states, districts, and schools must follow in exchange for federal funding.

What is different?

- ESSA gives education system leaders, like superintendents and school principals, more flexibility than they had before, on the condition that they engage with families and communities when they make decisions.

What can ESSA do for your child?

- For all schools in all states, ESSA impacts how we improve schools. Each state has submitted an “ESSA Plan” to the federal government that will tell you more. ESSA is just one tool that we can use to make sure that each child gets what they need.

What is “School Improvement”??

- School improvement is the process of learning about a school community and working to make it better by changing how money is spent, what programs are available, and who teaches, counsels, and mentors your child. District and school administrators lead the school improvement process, but they must engage with parents and families. This process happens in cycles (every year or every three years).

How can you get involved?

- Under ESSA, parents and families must be involved in school improvement. In other words, regardless of whether you have been included in the past, and regardless of citizenship status, language, guardianship, or ability, YOU have every right to be involved in making your schools better. Your school and district leaders are required to make that possible. See the next page for more!
Take Action for School Improvement!

Your district and school are responsible for these steps:

1. **Learn More** about your community
2. **Set Goals** informed by what your community cares about
3. **Make a Plan** based on community priorities
4. **Write it Down** to be accountable to the plan
5. **Make it Happen** by working hard and involving your community
6. **Evaluate** and share how things are going so that we can all get better over time

Parents and families can:

1. **Share your story** with other families & find common ground
2. **Inform the goals**: What is success for your child? What kind of school do you want for your child?
3. **Help set priorities** for student supports and programs
4. **Help to write the plan down** in all the places it can go! (e.g. the district budget, Local ESSA Plan, school handbook, bulletin, or newsletter)
5. **Organize, volunteer, & show up!** This is your community & You have a right to be involved!
6. **Give feedback to your school**:
   - Is your child doing better?
   - Has your school gotten better?
   - How can we keep getting better?

*Your school has to write a “School Improvement Plan.” Learn more by contacting your district administrators.

*For more information about what you can help to write, check out our resource, Where to “Write it Down”

**Questions to Get Started:**

Is your child struggling? How? How can your school support them? Are programs in place to support all students?

Do you know who in your school community can help you advocate for your child (e.g. other parents, teachers, a family liaison, community organizer, minister, coach, or nurse)?

What other parents/families and organizers want the same change? How can you work together?

Learn more about school improvement in the **Organizer’s Packet**

This is a Tool from the **Engage for Education Equity Toolkit**. Find more at partnersforeachandeverychild.org/engageforedequity
Find more information about who can help you advocate for your child and all children at your local community center, health organization, or community organization.

You can also find information from national advocates like the Dignity in Schools Campaign, whose resources you can find at dignityinschools.org.

For information about your school and the decisions your state has made about ESSA, check out your state education agency website, like your state department of education, for a summary of your state’s ESSA Plan and your school’s “report card,” which has information about your school’s performance.

(For Organizers: Put information about local resources here — e.g. contact information for school site council)
Sample Meeting Agenda 1

Engagement in School Improvement

60 minutes; 20-60 Participants

Parents, Families, and/or Other Community Members

We encourage you to change this agenda to suit your interests (topic, advocacy issue), your audience (families, teachers, students, etc.), and to your needs (timing, information level, and space).

- **Introduction: Who are the presenters/facilitators?** [10 minutes]
  - Introductions (Who are you? Why you are here?)
  - Poll participants (Who is here? Why/what matters most to you?).
  - Set group meeting norms.

  USE: **Sample Meeting Norms**

- **Engagement and ESSA: What is engagement? Why is it important?** [5 minutes]
  - Engagement means *meaningful community involvement in decision-making*.
  - Engagement is important! It is both legally required under ESSA, and essential for meeting the needs of our children.

- **The Essentials of Engagement: Information, strategy, continuous improvement**
  - **Information:** What is ESSA? [5 minutes]
    - Answer basic questions about what ESSA is and what it means for your school.
  
    USE: **The Organizer’s Packet**, pages 4-7, or **Parents & Families: Get involved in ESSA!**

  - **Strategy:** getting involved in school improvement [5 minutes]
    - Review the School Improvement Cycle to understand the process.
  
    USE: **The Organizer’s Packet**, page 8, or the third page of **Parents & Families: Get involved in ESSA!**

  - **Continuous Improvement:** What additional information do you need? Where is your community trying to go? What might you do to get there? [20 minutes]
    - **Workshop:** In groups of 4-5, choose one thing that you see as a barrier to success for your child/school and answer the following questions:
      - **Learn More:** What other information do you need to help you break down this barrier?
      - **Set Goals:** What is your goal? What are you hoping to change? Set a positive vision!
      - **Make a Plan:** Starting with *engagement*, who will you start to inform and engage with?
  
    USE: **The Organizer’s Packet**, pages 9-14

- **Sharing out:** [10 minutes]
  - What was your barrier? What is one piece of additional information you need to address it? Who will you be reaching out to first to engage?

- **Closing:** [5 minutes]
  - What’s next for this group? Make sure everyone knows when they will hear from you again and how, and that those who want to learn more have a way to do so.
How to Make Your Meetings Accessible

All meetings should be sensitive to the needs of the people who will participate. In order to promote greater representation from your community, consider the following suggestions for how to make meetings more accessible to all, and ask school and district administrators to ensure that they do everything they can!

The Checklist

- Target outreach to those whose voices often go unheard
- Make informative materials available:
  - Ahead of the meeting (including questions to consider)
  - In multiple languages and formats in consideration of varied levels of literacy and proficiency
  - In a format that is easy for all stakeholders to understand
  - Online
- Host events in a central location that is accessible to people with disabilities [see the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)], with transportation assistance
  - We recommend hosting events in places where community members feel safe. Consider that school grounds may not be the best choice
- Invite interpreters, including American Sign Language
- Provide food, and include options for those with dietary restrictions
- Hold multiple meetings, held at times when families and teachers can attend
- Provide childcare
- Provide access to homework help at the meeting
- Send out multiple reminders via email, text and on paper
- Record and/or live-stream the event
- Where money is available, offer to financially support travel
- Ensure that multiple experts on the issues are present, with time for Q&A

Moving Forward

Provide a platform to continue to engage with the issues following the meeting (e.g. a website and email for questions). You may also consider providing a physical place for stakeholders to go to provide ongoing input (e.g. Parent Center).
Sample Meeting Norms

Meetings with families and community members are all opportunities to build greater trust and a lasting, informed, and involved community. Take every opportunity to do it right!

What are Meeting Norms?

- Meeting norms are ways that your group agrees the meeting will go, how participants will behave, and what you hope to get out of the event.

How to Use Them

- Begin meetings with students, families, and community members by offering a few basic meeting norms for all members to follow and ask for community input to complete the list.
- This list should include norms for how you will engage together during this meeting and should be flexible to meet the needs of the community members in the meeting.
- Meeting norms should be written in large text and remain visible throughout the meeting.

Sample Norms:

- We will treat each other with respect
- We will be present both physically and mentally
- We will ask questions when in doubt
- We will encourage the participation of all participants
- We will keep what is said anonymous, unless otherwise specified
- We will be sensitive to different perspectives and experiences
- We will keep to our agenda, and finish on time
- We will take notes and share back what we hear with the group

Check out Learning Forward’s tool for building meeting norms for more, at learningforward.org!
Sample Meeting Exit Survey

Use this survey at the end of a meeting to learn more about how it went for those who participated so that you can learn more going forward. Modify it to suit your needs.

[Your Event Title]
[Date & Time]

Please fill out the following questions so that we can learn from you and improve going forward.

Name (optional): ____________________________
Contact (optional): __________________________

On a scale from 1-5, how engaged did you feel in this activity/meeting?

1  2  3  4  5

What part(s) of the conversation and/or material were most useful? Why?

What part(s) of the conversation and/or material were least useful? Why?

What is one thing you learned today? What is one thing you still want to learn/know?

Would you be interested in following up with us or doing more in the future?

yes  no

Any additional comments?

Thank you for participating!
This glossary defines terms and jargon used frequently in education policy conversations. It is designed to help education advocates and parents better understand what education policy professionals mean when they use these terms.

**academic standards**
A set of benchmarks for what all students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade level in order to advance to (and be ready for) the next grade level. States are required to have standards in reading/language arts, math, and science. They may also have standards in other subjects including social studies or physical education. See also: assessment

**accountability**
The policies and procedures states use to set goals for how well all students (and groups of students) should be doing academically, measure and identify how well schools do in meeting those goals, and support and improve schools and districts that are failing to meet the state goals. See also: state school rating system, indicators, support and improvement plan

**additional targeted support and improvement schools**
In the Every Student Succeeds Act, these are schools that have been identified for additional targeted support and improvement by the state because one or more groups of students in the school are performing at the same level as the lowest performing 5 percent of Title I schools in the state. These schools put together an improvement plan that is approved by the district. See also: comprehensive support schools, targeted support and improvement schools, support and improvement plan

**assessment**
Another word for “test.” In the federal education policy context, the term “assessment” refers to the one standardized annual test required under federal law in every grade between 3-8 and at least once in high school (grades 9-12). These measure student achievement (what a student knows and can do) and do not measure intelligence (a student’s underlying ability and potential). See also: indicators

**chronic absenteeism**
This is a measure for how many students miss a significant number of school days—such as 15 days or 10 percent of school days—for any reason, excused or unexcused. This is different from average daily attendance, which is the percent of students in attendance throughout the year.

**comprehensive support and improvement schools**
Schools in which a large share of students is not meeting state goals. These include schools in the bottom 5 percent of all Title I schools in the state, schools with graduation rates below 67 percent, and additional targeted support and improvement schools that have not improved. These schools must design and implement a support and improvement plan which is comprehensive and designed to raise achievement for all students in the school. See also: additional targeted support schools, targeted support and improvement schools, support and improvement plan
**disaggregated data**

Disaggregated data refers to data that is broken down to see information about different groups of students. Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, data must be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, family income, disability status, English learner status, gender, migrant status, status as a child in foster care, homelessness status, or military connected status. See also: subgroup

**English-language proficiency**

The ability to speak, listen to, read, and write English accurately and quickly. Students who are learning English as a second language are typically called “English learners” until they master the English language. This is different from proficiency in English/language arts, which is mastering the state’s academic content standards for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and using language. See also: English learner (EL), academic standards, indicators

**English learner (EL)**

A student between the ages of 3-21 in elementary or secondary school whose native language is a language other than English. Identified English learners are entitled to civil rights protections and accommodations. Title III of ESSA provides funding to support English learners. See also: English-language proficiency, Title III

**indicators**

Indicators are measures of different aspects of the education system that — taken together — create a picture of a school’s effectiveness at educating all students (e.g. graduation rates, expulsion rates, assessment scores). ESSA requires certain indicators in state accountability system and allows for others. See also: state school rating system, summative rating, accountability

**individualized educational program (IEP)**

A plan or program developed by a team, including teachers, specialists, and a student’s parent, that is designed to meet the educational needs of a student with a disability who qualifies for specialized instruction. Schools are required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to create IEPs for students with disabilities who qualify for specialized instruction.

**local educational agency (LEA)**

The formal name for governmental bodies that are legally sanctioned by the state to administer elementary or secondary schools (e.g. school district, charter school that is also a district) in a community. See also: SEA

**n-size**

The minimum number of students in a subgroup (e.g. Black students, English learners) that must be present in a school to trigger specific reporting and accountability requirements under federal law. An n-size is necessary to ensure data are not reported on so few students as to make identifiable personal information (e.g. reporting that all Latinx students are advanced in math when there is only one Latinx student means knowing the proficiency of a specific student, which is a violation of that child’s privacy). See also: subgroup

**needs assessment**

The analysis of the needs of a school that has been identified for support and improvement. This analysis forms the basis of a school’s support and improvement plan. See also: support and improvement plan
participation rate

The percent of students who participated in the state’s statewide annual assessment required under ESSA. The law requires that 95 percent of all students and of each subgroup of students be included in the assessment in order to prevent the exclusion of students who are historically marginalized and to ensure there is sufficient data to understand how whole schools and districts are doing. See also: assessment

state educational agency (SEA)

The formal name for governmental bodies that are legally sanctioned by the state to provide information, resources, and technical assistance to schools, districts, and people in the community served by schools (e.g. state department of education). See also: LEA

state school rating system

The system which combines various indicators to produce a summative rating for a school. These ratings are based on a standard set of criteria identified by the state. The system must also identify schools that are in the bottom 5 percent of all Title I schools, schools that have graduation rates of less than 67 percent, schools that have a subgroup of students who are consistently underperforming, and schools that have a subgroup of students whose performance is so low that it is comparable to the performance of schools in the bottom 5 percent of schools. See also: summative rating, comprehensive support and improvement schools, targeted support and improvement schools, additional targeted support and improvement schools, support and improvement plan, indicators

subgroup

A group of students identified by their race, ethnicity, family income, English proficiency, or disability status (e.g. Black students, White students, students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch). Using data about individual student groups helps to identify the presence of barriers to success based on identity and point toward the need for targeted remedies. See also: super-subgroup, disaggregated

Report Cards

Access to data is an important advocacy tool because it provides the public with information about areas where schools or districts need to improve that they wouldn’t otherwise know. To achieve this end, ESSA requires states and districts to publish annual report cards with information about the state as a whole and all districts and schools within the state. Most of this information must be separated (or “disaggregated”) by student characteristics, including major racial and ethnic groups, family income, disability status, and language status. Some data must also be disaggregated by gender, foster care status, homeless status, military connected status, and migrant status.

The data that must be reported includes:

- Details of the state accountability system, including which schools were identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement and Targeted Support and Improvement;
- Results on all accountability indicators (such as student achievement and high school graduation); and
- Opportunity measures (such as Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate/dual enrollment, suspension and expulsion, chronic absenteeism, educator qualifications, and per-pupil expenditures).

See page 10 of The Leadership Conference Education Fund’s ESSA Guide for Advocates for more on School Report Cards.
support and improvement plan

The plan a school designs and implements to raise student achievement on either a comprehensive (meaning for all the students in the school) or targeted (meaning for a subgroup of students in a school) basis once the school has been identified. The plan must be informed by an assessment of the needs of the particular school, be developed with stakeholder input (e.g. parents, teachers, and principals) and implement research-based strategies. See also: state school rating system, comprehensive support and improvement schools, targeted support and improvement schools, additional targeted support and improvement schools

targeted support and improvement schools

Schools that are identified through the state school rating system because they have one or more groups of students who are consistently underperforming. These schools must design and implement a targeted support and improvement plan that is approved by the district and is designed to raise achievement for the group(s) of students that is (are) consistently underperforming. See also: comprehensive support and improvement schools, additional targeted support and improvement schools, subgroup

Title I plan / consolidated state plan

A state’s plan for complying with the requirements of ESSA. A state has the option of submitting plans separately for each title (e.g. Title I plan, Title III plan) or for submitting a plan which describes what the state intends to do to comply with the requirements of the entire law (consolidated plan). These plans must be developed in consultation with stakeholders, be available for public comment, and be submitted to and approved by the U.S. Department of Education. ESSA includes various requirements for the information included in a state’s plan such as specifics of the statewide accountability system. See also: Title I

Components of ESSA

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 review due to federal lands.

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.