

2. Engaging on School Improvement Strategies

PART 2 should be read in the context of state-specific decisions – many made in state ESSA plans.

ESSA emphasizes a wide range of services that district and school leaders can support, creating an opportunity for them to rethink the services they provide and how they connect to state and local priorities. Stakeholders can play a critical role in helping LEAs, other district leaders, and schools develop these strategic priorities.

This section provides a synopsis of key issue areas that can be informed and expanded on through stakeholder engagement. These are not the only topics leaders should discuss with their stakeholders, but they represent specific areas that can be strengthened through more nuanced and targeted stakeholder input. It is essential that all school improvement programs be chosen based on evidence of their success.

What is in This Part?

2.1 Engagement is a School Improvement Strategy

2.2 Achieving Equity: A “Whole Child” Approach to Strategy

- ⇒ Improving Data Systems and Reporting
- ⇒ Restructuring Academic Assessments
- ⇒ Incorporating Technology in the Classroom
- ⇒ Introducing Advanced Coursework
- ⇒ Increasing Access to After-School and Expanded Learning
- ⇒ *Creating a Positive/Pro-Social School Climate*
 - ⇒ *Behavior Support and Discipline Practices*
 - ⇒ *Social and Emotional Learning*
 - ⇒ *Reducing Bullying and Harassment*
- ⇒ Increasing Nutrition and Food Access
- ⇒ Aligning and Supporting Early Childhood Education
- ⇒ Reducing Chronic Absence
- ⇒ Increasing Access to the Arts
- ⇒ Supporting English Learners
- ⇒ Supporting Students with Disabilities
- ⇒ Supporting Students in Foster Care and Experiencing Homelessness
- ⇒ Supporting Teachers and Leaders

Each Strategy Page Has:

- **What to Learn from Your State’s ESSA Plan**
- **Guidance for School Improvement**
- **Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA**
- **Essential Stakeholders**
- **Ask the Experts**

2.1 Engagement is a School Improvement Strategy

The School Improvement Strategy

Stakeholder engagement is, by itself, a best practice for achieving better outcomes for kids. Making decisions on education policy in an inclusive and transparent way leads to more informed decisions and encourages stakeholders to become partners in achieving the goals of the state and local community. Further, partnerships with community stakeholders — including parent groups, philanthropy, community-based organizations, tribes and tribal organizations, and others — build local capacity to implement innovative and ambitious strategies for meeting the needs of all students.

Promoting Equity

When engaging with your communities, it is essential that you engage with community members that have traditionally or historically left out of the decision-making process and those who represent the greatest need in your community. Meaningful engagement of stakeholders means make explicit and resourced efforts to engage with students and families of color, communities representing differences in language, ability, religious background, LGBTQ+ identities, and students and families in low-income and low wealth communities.



Keep in Mind

We must prioritize processes and decisions that consider our shared responsibility to serve our many students, and that means ensuring that the needs of all students — including English learners, migrant students, students of color, Native students, students from low-income families, students experiencing homelessness or foster care, and students with disabilities — are represented, heard, and incorporated into our decision-making.

Highlighted Resources

How to Build an Engagement Strategy to Support School Improvement



[Nine Elements of Effective School Community Partnerships to Address Student Mental Health, Physical Health, and Overall Wellness](#) (IEL, NASP)

[Building Family and Community Demand for Dramatic Change in Schools — includes City-based examples](#) (Public Impact)

[Process and Protest: Promising Engagement Practices](#) (Partners for Each and Every Child)

[Seizing the Moment: A District Guide to Advance Equity Through ESSA](#) (Aspen Institute)

Engaging with Specific Groups

More information about strategies for including specific groups and partners in your stakeholder engagement strategy can be found in our first Handbook, [Meaningful Local Engagement Under ESSA: A Handbook for Lea and School Leaders](#).

Family Engagement, Partnerships, and Community Schools

To best serve our public school students, we must rely on one another to learn more about and support each of their individual needs and strengths. Students, their families, in-school personnel, and community members will be strong and important allies in the local planning process. Only with their ideas, support, and investment, can an ambitious vision for improvement and achievement be met.

However, distributed and/or collaborative leadership requires significant investment of time and resources. It will be essential to develop a comprehensive strategy for how stakeholders will be engaged in the process of local planning and implementation and when. This strategy should consider:

- Development of **policy leadership teams** that include parents and families and meet regularly throughout the school year to evaluate and make decisions about specific school improvement strategies
- The use of students, teachers and family members as **ambassadors and information-leaders** to share and collect information for school and district leaders
- **Partnerships** with strong community organizations and leaders to support materials development, convening capacity, information dissemination, translation services, and other resources

Development and implementation of a community schools strategy that incorporates partnerships into the model of schooling and houses community organizations on-site—learn more about how to use this model from the Coalition for Community Schools at communityschools.org.



Keep in Mind

Student outcomes are the goal. It is important to remember throughout your planning and engagement process that the ultimate goal of all school improvement strategy — and therefore stakeholder engagement efforts — is to improve outcomes for all students.

Spotlight on Burburnett Independent School District, Texas Title I for Families

Burburnett Independent School District created a short, family-friendly video on what it means to be a Title I school, including how families and students can get involved. They used a free platform, PowToon, to create it.

Check it out at www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-baTFnhJRU



2.2 Achieving Equity: A “Whole Child” Approach to Strategy

Best Strategies Address the Whole Child

Meeting your school community’s needs will require a holistic approach that includes investment in programming that extends student support systems beyond academic performance and recognizes the learning impact of a student’s physical and mental health, home environment, and community.

What is the Whole Child?

This “whole child” approach¹ requires increased alignment of services to meet student needs, and support for educators and community partners to prioritize engaged learning. ESSA gives SEAs and LEAs flexibility to address the comprehensive needs of students via diversifying accountability plans to include indicators of school quality; increasing professional development opportunities; and increasing the number of school employed mental health professionals. Such strategies work to not only support students academically through programs like tutoring, but to meet other health and psychosocial development needs through engagement of families and partnerships with outside organizations, such as food banks, health care providers, institutes of higher learning, youth development organizations, and employment support agencies.² Each of the outlined strategies for improving student academic success should be considered part of a whole child approach and can include community partnership to build capacity (e.g. financial, staffing) for greater impact.

ESSA Support

ESSA recognizes a whole child approach to education in a number of ways, including funding for direct non-academic services, counseling and community schools (e.g. Title I, Title IV 21st CCLC), and broad flexibility for support and improvement strategies to potentially include non-academic supports. Examples of whole child strategies or programs include promoting civic engagement within the community, social-emotional learning, inclusive or positive behavioral supports, expanded learning opportunities, and addressing mental and physical wellness (including counseling, trauma-informed care, and substance abuse treatment).

¹ Whole child approaches might also be referred to as community school strategies, integrated student supports, wrap-around services, or school-linked services.

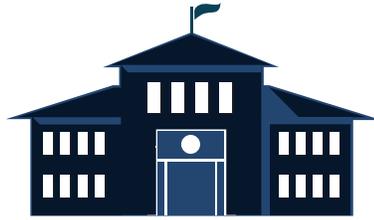
² http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dan-cardinali/the-experts-have-spoken-i_b_4842549.html



Success of the Whole Child Approach

Statistics have shown that whole child supports have a far reach. In a 2014 report, whole child approaches — such as integrated support services and community schools — were estimated to reach 1.5 million students in 3,000 schools.

Learn more at the Whole Child Approach. teams, and charter management.



Once you and your community have determined your priorities, choose from the following pages which strategies could be most helpful to your school improvement efforts.

Promoting Equity

These school improvement strategies should be implemented in a targeted way. It may be the case that all of your students require the same interventions, but it is more likely that different students, staff, and families require differentiated support. Choose from the following school improvement strategies considering this approach.

Ask the Experts: School Improvement

- ✓ [Best Practices for School Improvement Planning](#) (Hanover Research)
- ✓ [Five Strategies for Creating a High-Growth School](#) (Battelle for Kids; SOAR Learning and Leading Collaborative)
- ✓ [Implementing Change: Rethinking School Improvement Strategies and Funding Under ESSA](#) (Chiefs for Change)

Highlighted Resources Additional Strategies



These program strategies are not the only ones that work. We recommend you take a look at resources to support the students and school community you serve, like:

- AASA's [Leveling the Playing Field for Rural Students](#),
- the Lexington Institute's [Better Serving Those Who Serve: Improving the Educational Opportunities of Military-Connected Students](#),
- the National Black Child Development Institute's [Being Black Is Not a Risk Factor: A Strengths-Based Look at the State of the Black Child](#), or
- the Rural Schools Collaborative's website at ruralschoolscollaborative.org/stories for examples of rural schools and districts engaging with their communities to support kids

Improving Data Systems and Reporting

What to Learn from Your State’s ESSA Plan

Each state has determined which statewide data must be collected, which includes data to support the state’s new “indicators” of school and student excellence and/or progress. SEAs are also required to determine the format and platform for local reporting for that information and must support cross-district uniformity and collaboration around data collection through data systems and technical assistance. In every state, LEAs must ensure fidelity to these standards at the school level and must publicly report required information through state-developed school and district report cards.

See pages 10-13 of the full Handbook for more on Assessing School Climate.

Guidance for School Improvement

LEAs and schools will need to work with their local community to build understanding around reporting systems, as well as ensure that data collection and evaluation tools at the local level are meaningfully developed and/or implemented. LEAs should be proactive in communicating available data to parents and community members — including disaggregated information about student and school performance, teachers, and district administration — in ways that are user-friendly, translated into multiple languages, and accessible for parents with disabilities, students, and rural communities without internet access.

LEAs and schools will also need to describe their plans for use of collected data for coaching, feedback, and continuous improvement. Civil rights groups representing historically underserved populations can be helpful partners by sharing this information and gathering and reporting back any feedback, questions or concerns.

Accurate, comprehensive data is essential for decision-making, so LEAs and schools should consider regular, independent audits or reviews of data systems, and should work with families and community members to ensure that these systems and the presented data are useful.

Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA

TITLE I, PART A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies

TITLE I PART C: Education of Migratory Children

TITLE II PART A: Supporting Effective Instruction

Spotlight on Excellent School Reporting The “My School Info Challenge”



The My School Information Design Challenge was launched by the Foundation for Excellence in Education as a national competition to rethink and redesign the way in which school performance data is presented so that it is more accessible and more actionable for parents, policymakers and the public at large.

Check out their report to see what the winners came up with at myschoolinfochallenge.com.

Essential Stakeholders

- ✓ Students, families, and school community members, including educators and other school personnel and after-school program leaders
- ✓ Tribes, tribal education directors, and tribal organizations
- ✓ Data systems management partners (state coordinators and/or software administrators)
- ✓ Local community-based organizations and advocates, including those with strong web presences and data presentation or communications expertise
- ✓ Advocates who can support print and oral distribution of information
- ✓ After-school and out-of-school learning providers, including early education and child care centers, after-school programs, and youth groups (including faith-based)
- ✓ Early Learning providers, including childcare centers
- ✓ Charter Management Organizations (CMO) and charter school leaders

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [Transparency for Families and Communities](#) (Data Quality Campaign)
- ✓ [Communicating Performance: A Best Practices Resource for Developing State Report Cards](#) (CCSSO)
- ✓ [Data Equity Walk Toolkit](#) (The Education Trust)
- ✓ [Building State Capacity for Powerful School Information: Results of the My School Information Design Challenge](#) (ExcelinEd)

Spotlight on Louisiana An Accessible Report Card System



Louisiana went from theory to action in the development and implementation of a new report card system that meets the needs of their stakeholders. In order to present information in easy-to-understand ways or at the right level of depth for their diversity of stakeholders, Louisiana created two different tools for describing school and student performance. The first, known within the state as the “School Finder,” represents Louisiana’s federally-required school report card, and allows parents to compare schools and early childhood centers from across the state based on location, performance, and academic and extracurricular offerings. Over time, the state will also add in information about school finance, Free Federal Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) completion, and teacher attendance data.

To address the outstanding needs of school and district leaders, Louisiana also developed a secure data portal for school leaders and superintendents, with plans to expand role-based access over time. The “Louisiana Principal and Superintendent Secure Reporting Portal” enables users to recreate their accountability score based on individual student data, answer core questions about comparative performance and trends, receive “insight” statements based on the data (i.e., your school performed in the top 80 percent of schools in the state on this measure), and download student rosters to target interventions.

Check out [“A School Finder to Empower”](#) from CCSSO for more.

Restructuring Academic Assessments

What to Learn from Your State's ESSA Plan

While states are required to test students in grades three through eight in reading and math, ESSA only requires states to test students at least once in high school ELA and math. For science, students must be tested at least once during each grade span (3-5; 6-9; 10-12). ESSA provides a range of assessment opportunities for LEAs, including:

- At the high school level, LEAs may opt to use “nationally recognized assessments” (e.g. ACT, SAT) in lieu of the annual state assessment, if approved by the state. Districts that use nationally recognized assessments are also required to ensure accommodations are available for students who require them.
- If a state chooses to apply for the Innovative Assessment Pilot, the state will be working with selected local districts to try alternative ways to assess student learning, such as competency-based testing.
 - LEAs may use funds to audit local assessment processes and tools to remove unnecessary exams or to improve existing tests. LEAs cannot apply for the pilot separately and should connect with the SEA to learn about eligibility.
- All LEAs are required to notify parents annually of state and local testing participation policies.³

Guidance for School Improvement

Depending on state decisions, LEAs might work with schools and stakeholders to restructure local testing requirements. LEA leaders should be transparent about both broad and unique needs around types of assessments, testing time, and necessary data. As part of a larger strategy for school improvement, districts and/or schools may consider assessments for school leadership or personnel and use results to drive professional development opportunities (e.g. cultural competency, family and community engagement).

Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA

TITLE I, PART A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies

TITLE II PART A: Supporting Effective Instruction

TITLE IV, PART B: 21st Century Community Learning Centers

3. American Federation of Teachers. “Every Student Succeeds Act: A New Day in Public Education.” Standards and Assessments. Accessed May 1, 2017



Assessment Participation

For accountability purposes, LEAs are required to have at least 95 percent of students from each school, as well as students in each subgroup, participate in testing. Each state determines through its state accountability system how to address those schools that do not meet this 95 percent threshold. LEAs and schools must educate communities and families about these requirements.

Essential Stakeholders

- ✓ Families and students, particularly those that feel strongly opposed and in favor of standardized testing, and those whose children use testing accommodations, and families of students with disabilities and English learners
- ✓ Teachers and administrators across subjects and grades, including teachers of students taking alternate assessments
- ✓ Disability rights advocates
- ✓ Civil Rights organizations
- ✓ Assessment developers and administrations
- ✓ Curriculum directors and specialists, including professional development directors (e.g. Representatives from Native American Language Immersion Schools) and experts in culturally relevant curricula
- ✓ Information Technology services and internet providers

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts](#) (Achieve)
- ✓ [Developing and Measuring Higher Order Skills: Models for State Performance Assessment Systems](#) (CCSSO and the Learning Policy Institute)

Spotlight on New Hampshire Deeper Learning Assessment

New Hampshire's Performance Assessment of Competency Education (PACE) is an accountability strategy that offers locally-developed common performance assessments.



Incorporating Technology in the Classroom

What to Learn from Your State's ESSA Plan

States will be responsible for distributing most of the funding that support digital learning efforts, internet connectivity enhancement, and access to technology in schools to LEAs through a state-determined formula and/or sub-grant process. LEAs should learn more about how their local technology needs align with state priorities.

Guidance for School Improvement

Technology is no longer treated as a compartmentalized component of the new law, as it was in NCLB's Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT) grant program. Rather, it is included in several parts of ESSA as an important solution for a range of educational needs and as a strategy for school improvement. ESSA also emphasizes new models of learning and recognizes technology's role in making them a reality, such as "digital learning" and "blended learning."

Title I flexibility includes opportunities for schools to use technology in the classroom as a strategy for improving student academic achievement.

Up to 60 percent of Title IV's Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant funding can be used to support innovative education technology strategies, including technology infrastructure (no more than 15 percent).

Additionally, Title II funds can be used for professional development to support technology in schools, including integration of technology into curriculum and instruction.

Learn more about how to use ESSA funds to support technology in the classroom and in schools at the Office of Educational Technology website: tech.ed.gov/ESSA.

Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA

- TITLE I, PART A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies
- TITLE II, PART A: Building Systems of Support for Excellent Teaching and Learning
- TITLE III, PART A: English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act
- TITLE IV, PART A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants

What is Digital Learning?



ESSA defines digital learning as "any instructional practice that effectively uses technology to strengthen a student's learning experience and encompasses a wide spectrum of tools and practices." This can include:

- Interactive resources, digital content, software or simulations
- Access to online databases and primary-source documents
- Use of data and information to personalize learning and provide targeted supplementary instruction
- Online and computer-based assessments
- Learning environments that promote collaboration and communication
- Hybrid or blended learning models
- Access to online courses for students in rural areas

Essential Stakeholders

- ✓ Local internet providers, including University systems
- ✓ Businesses and non-profit organizations that support technology use among youth and/or in classrooms
- ✓ Families and students, including those that are often underrepresented
- ✓ Library systems and personnel
- ✓ Technology experts to engage students in 21st Century Skills
- ✓ ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education)
- ✓ Peer principals, superintendents, and other school and district leaders
- ✓ Gifted and Talented program leaders
- ✓ Charter Management Organizations (CMO) and charter school leaders

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [ESSA, EdTech and the Future of Education](#) (Center for Digital Education)
- ✓ [Who's Who: Edu Stakeholders and How to Find Them](#) (The Ed Tech Handbook)
- ✓ [Guide to Choosing Digital Content and Curriculum](#) (Center for Digital Education)

Spotlight on Coachella Valley, CA Wi-Fi Enabled Buses



Coachella Valley Unified School District (CVUSD) in California serves a low-income population, with 100 percent of its students receiving free or reduced-priced lunches. In 2011, Superintendent Adams coordinated an effort to ensure every student had a web-enabled device and access to the internet. As part of this effort, Adams and his team initiated the Wi-Fi on Wheels program, which places routers on school buses and equips them with a ruggedized, secure mobile network from Cradlepoint so students can access the internet while traveling to and from school. Since implementation, the district's graduation rate, which hovered around 70 percent when Adams joined CVUSD, now exceeds the national level at 84 percent. "It's opened up the world of education for our students," says Adams. "If you're not connected, it's difficult to be successful."

Several other school districts, including Miami-Dade County Public Schools in Florida and Kanawha County Schools in West Virginia, have implemented bus-based mobile Wi-Fi from Cradlepoint.

Introducing Advanced Coursework

What to Learn from Your State's ESSA Plan

Advanced coursework refers to classes that provide students the opportunity to earn college credit while in high school, including Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and dual enrollment. Research shows that rigorous high school courses contribute to postsecondary success, and students who enter college with six or more credits are more likely to earn a degree.

ESSA provides states the opportunity to use information about advanced coursework completion and/or enrollment in accountability systems as an indicator of school and student success. Regardless of its use in state accountability, however, Title I flexibility around direct student services (DSS) allows states to set aside 3 percent of their Title I funds for use in a targeted way to expand access to advanced coursework and instructional options, including public school choice, personalized learning, credit recovery, and advanced coursework.

Guidance for School Improvement

While many states have statewide systems that offer access to advanced coursework, districts and schools may use nationally-available online courses, university partnerships, or locally-initiated in-school course offerings that expand student access to advanced coursework.

Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA

TITLE I, PART A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies

TITLE III, PART A: English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act

TITLE IV, PART A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants



Keep in Mind

Districts are required to report advanced coursework data to US ED's Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), including for all students and specific subgroups. It is important that when reporting on access to rigorous courses, the data is accurate, annual, timely and reported in a way that makes disparities clear.

Essential Stakeholders

- ✓ Institutions of higher education, including state and community colleges
- ✓ Departments of Labor
- ✓ Training course providers
- ✓ Advanced assessment providers (e.g. College Board)
- ✓ Community-based organizations providing advanced courses or training to students
- ✓ Online course providers
- ✓ Families and students, particularly those that are often underrepresented and those that may not have access to online coursework and/or require financial support for assessments
- ✓ School counselors, including college/post-secondary advisors
- ✓ Network or advanced coursework coordinators

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [Advanced Coursework](#) (Education Trust)
- ✓ [Help Low-Income Students Access the Promise of AP](#) (College Board)
- ✓ [Expanding Equity: Leveraging the Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\) to provide Direct Student Services](#) (Chiefs for Change)

Spotlight on Rhode Island: The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) Advanced Coursework Network



All Rhode Island public secondary schools have the opportunity to expand coursework available to their high school and middle school students through the Advanced Coursework Network. Districts and schools have the option of joining the Network as Network Members, in which they allow their students to enroll in coursework offered by the Network. More than 35 schools and districts are currently members, including charter programs, offering hundreds of college credit, AP, career and/or advanced secondary courses offered in person and online.

Increasing Access to After-School and Expanded Learning

What to Learn from Your State's ESSA Plan

ESSA does not require any minimum in-school time hours or days, though all states have requirements for minimum number of school days and/or hours.⁴ Some states have initiated formal partnerships with statewide out-of-school learning providers or offer subsidies for or other endorsements of particular providers, school day structures, or after school learning opportunities.

Guidance for School Improvement

After-school programming can support student well-being through a number of program strategies, including the arts, social-emotional learning, workplace experience or internship programs, mental and physical healthcare access, and summer learning opportunities. After school and expanded learning time can also be used to engage with families and communities through collaborative programming (e.g. early learning programming with students and families or young parents) or partnership (e.g. community center-led after school youth groups or civic engagement).

Re-structured or Extended School Time

While expanded learning is explicitly defined under ESSA as additional in-school hours and/or summer learning opportunities, expanded learning might also include restructured school days, funded through similar funding streams. For example, longer class periods focused on project-based learning or co-led classes to allow for greater planning time for teachers.

Tutoring/Individual Support

States may reserve up to 3 percent of school funding for student support services, such as academic tutoring. Additionally, with the introduction of accountability indicators that emphasize college readiness, states and district may transition to greater emphasis on student supports like tutoring. Whatever your state has decided, making tutoring services available to your students—either through community-based partnerships (e.g. YMCA), or contracted services—can be a valuable intervention. Look to Title I, Part A for support for “components of a personalized learning approach, which may include high-quality academic tutoring.” [ESSA, Sec. 1003A(c)(3)(D)]

Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA

TITLE I, PART A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies

TITLE IV, PART A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants

TITLE IV, PART B: 21st Century Community Learning Centers

TITLE V, PART B, Subpart 2: Rural and Low-Income School Program

4. <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/95/05/9505.pdf>

Essential Stakeholders

- ✓ Students and their families, particularly those who are chronically absent, students with disabilities, English learners, foster youth, homeless youth, and students who are struggling academically
- ✓ School based personnel including principals, teachers, specialized instructional support personnel and school employed mental health providers
- ✓ Public health professionals, including substance abuse support services and trauma-informed care experts and professionals
- ✓ Civil rights organizations and community-based organizations that support students, youth, and their families (e.g. family resource centers, faith-based organizations, tribal organizations, health organizations, local libraries, and after-school programs)
- ✓ Peer schools and districts to support resource-sharing, inform out-of-school strategies, and/or professional learning

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [Beyond the Bell: Turning Research into Action in Afterschool and Expanded Learning \(AIR\)](#)
- ✓ [Opportunities for Afterschool in ESSA \(Afterschool Alliance\)](#)
- ✓ [Tools and Resources \(National Center on Time & Learning\)](#)



What is Expanded Learning?

Expanded learning time is defined under the law as additional time for program and instruction and supports instructional and support staff (including professional development on family and community engagement).

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Creating a Positive/Pro-Social School Climate

School climate is the quality of school life based on student, family and staff experiences of the school environment. It reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.

School climate is affected by all aspects of a school, including learning opportunities, extracurricular and expanded learning opportunities, assessments, etc. To address school climate, consider the physical and emotional safety of students, families, and staff; the development of and attention to interpersonal relationships; school discipline policy and practice; and student and family engagement — especially as these conditions or experiences differ among groups.

The following pages outline some of the strategies that address school climate:

- ⇒ Behavior Support & Discipline Practices
- ⇒ Social and Emotional Learning
- ⇒ Addressing Bullying and Harassment

Highlighted Resources

Teachers Unite's "Growing Fairness Toolkit"



The Growing Fairness Toolkit is over 250 (and growing!) pages of original reflections, protocols, lesson plans, and so much more, written by teachers and students in schools across the city that are working to create restorative and inclusive school communities. The Toolkit is a resource created alongside the Growing Fairness documentary and workshops. Organized by school, it includes relevant information for readers to best understand the climate in which the tools were developed.

Find it at teachersunite.toolkits

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline](#) (US ED)
- ✓ [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments—Resources](#)
- ✓ [School Climate and Bullying Prevention](#) (National School Climate Center)
- ✓ [2015 National School Climate Survey: LGBTQ Students Experience Pervasive Harassment and Discrimination, But School-Based Supports Can Make a Difference](#) (GLSEN)



Keep in Mind

Programs and policies that support students' well-being can and should apply to adults as well. Supporting healthy staff, families, and partners is essential.

Spotlight on Baltimore "School Climate Walk"



Baltimore City Public Schools developed a "[school climate walk](#)" assessment that includes physical environment, student and staff behavior, and classroom environment. This assessment is intended to be filled out in a single day via direct observation.

Behavior Support and Discipline Practices

What to Learn from Your State's ESSA Plan

States must describe, under Title I, how they will support LEAs and schools to improve “school conditions for student learning” through reducing the overuse of discipline that removes students from classrooms, and the use of behavioral interventions that compromise student health and safety.⁵

Guidance for School Improvement

Exclusionary or “zero-tolerance” discipline practices (e.g. suspension/expulsion, restraint and seclusion) have a significant negative impact on academic outcomes for students. Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS) strategies, restorative practices, and other inclusive discipline practices are evidence-based strategies that lead to better learning outcomes for all students, particularly for those struggling the most. Under IDEA, PBIS is a recommended consideration for addressing the needs for students with disabilities and promoting inclusive leadership.

LEAs and schools should consider implementing a behavior framework that is preventive, multi-tiered, and culturally responsive, and be transparent about discipline data and decision-making about their discipline practices.⁶ Additionally, disproportionality in the use of harmful discipline strategies between students of color and their white peers, or for students with disabilities must be addressed. Behavioral support is explicitly listed under Title I as an allowable use of funds to support students.

Reducing Policing in Schools

The presence of policing in schools contributes to the School-to-Prison Pipeline. Given that all disciplinary changes must be systemic, reducing the unequal and harmful effects of law enforcement as a disciplinary tool includes: ending or reducing the regular presence of law enforcement in schools, creating safe schools through positive safety and discipline measures, and restricting the role of law enforcement that are called in to schools to ensure that students’ rights to education and dignity are protected, including their constitutional rights to counsel and due process. Check out the Dignity in School Campaign’s Resource Guide on Counselors not Cops and the National Association of School Psychologists’ A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools for more.

Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA

TITLE I, PART A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies

TITLE II PART A: Supporting Effective Instruction

TITLE IV, PART B: 21st Century Community Learning Centers

5. <http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/education/School-Discipline-Provisions-in-the-Every-Student-Succeeds-Act.pdf>

6. <https://www.pbis.org/common/cms/files/pbisresources/MTSS-B-Equity%20FINAL.pdf5>



Keep in Mind

Changes in discipline practices must include family engagement and professional development to ensure that the program is comprehensively used and implemented with fidelity to the evidence-based practice.

Essential Stakeholders

- ✓ Students and families, including students with disabilities, English learners, system-involved youth, chronically absent students, students in the foster system or who are experiencing homelessness, students affected by trauma, and others
- ✓ Disability rights advocates
- ✓ Discipline or school climate experts (e.g. Center for Restorative Process; PBIS)
- ✓ Educators and educator trainers (e.g. Teachers Unite)
- ✓ Youth development organizations and out-of-school time providers
- ✓ Alternative education programs
- ✓ Law enforcement
- ✓ Civil Rights organizations and community-based organizations (CBOs) that promote the social and emotional welfare of young children and families, including national and local advocates (e.g. Healthy Schools Campaign)

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [Aligning and Integrating Family Engagement in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports \(PBIS\)](#) (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports)
- ✓ [ESSA Resources](#) (Dignity in Schools Campaign)
- ✓ [Educational Exclusion: Drop Out, Push Out, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline among LGBTQ Youth](#) (GLSEN)
- ✓ [Stopping School Pushout for: Girls of Color](#) (National Women's Law Center)

Spotlight on New York, NY: Implementing Restorative Practices



During the 2013-2014 school year, NYC schools reported more than 53,000 suspensions and Black students, less than one third of the student population, were given more than half of the suspensions citywide, and students with disabilities, 12 percent of the student body, were given 30 percent of the suspensions. Four schools in New York City committed to ending these disparities and began to engage with stakeholders to transform their school climates.

Read more about their practices and results in the Case Study: [Building Safe, Supportive and Restorative School Communities in New York City](#) (Teachers Unite).

Spotlight on Oakland Unified School District, CA Restorative Justice in Schools

OUSD began to implement Restorative Justice (RJ) practices in schools in 2011. Since then, the RJ program in OUSD has successfully helped to decrease suspensions by half across the district. In addition to in-school tools for students, the RJ program in OUSD has trained over 1000 staff in restorative practices, including law enforcement.

Learn more about the project at www.ousd.org/restorativejustice. Watch a video to hear from teachers and students at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdKhcQrLD1w>. Read the guide to implementation: <http://rjoyoakland.org/wp-content/uploads/OUSTRJOY-Implementation-Guide.pdf>

Creating a Positive/Pro-Social School Climate: Social and Emotional Learning

What to Learn from Your State's ESSA Plan

ESSA requires states to look beyond test scores in their accountability systems, and to incorporate other factors that play into student success, such as social and emotional learning (SEL) and school climate. Use of these non-academic factors provide LEAs with an opportunity to look beyond instructional activities and address other issues facing students. Learn more about the indicators your state has chosen, including why, and how those indicators might change over time.

Guidance for School Improvement

Social and emotional learning (SEL) includes all strategies designed to support understanding and management of emotions, including goal-setting, collaborative work, empathy, positive relationship-building, and responsible decision-making.

While SEL is often an integrated part of district and school frameworks for learning, discrete programs or strategies to promote SEL include:

- school climate improvement efforts,
- access to comprehensive mental and behavioral health,
- nutrition and physical health access,
- positive behavioral supports, and professional development for leaders on cultural competencies (e.g. racial healing, language, public systems and services and their impact).

Additionally, schools that collect data around these strategies and their outcomes can embed research-based best practices into their curriculum and professional development for their school-based staff.

Professional Development

Title II, Part A allows for more investment to attract, train and retain school leaders. As LEAs examine district and school policies related to developing practices that support positive social, emotional and academic growth, they should also identify ways to incorporate these practices into school leader professional development. Title II, Part B also contains competitive grant programs that can be used to embed school leadership practices that facilitate SEL skills like self-management, social awareness and conflict resolution.

Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA

TITLE I, PART A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies
TITLE II PART A: Supporting Effective Instruction
TITLE IV, PART B: 21st Century Community Learning Centers

Highlighted Resource CASEL Program Guides for Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs



The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has developed five SEL “Competency Clusters”:

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision-making

Read the CASEL Program Guides at casel.org/guide.

Essential Stakeholders

- ✓ Students and families, including students with disabilities, English learners, system-involved youth, chronically absent students, students in the foster system or who are experiencing homelessness, students affected by trauma, and others.
- ✓ Educators and educator trainers (e.g. Teachers Unite)
- ✓ Youth development organizations and out-of-school time providers
- ✓ Alternative education programs
- ✓ Law enforcement
- ✓ Civil rights organizations and community-based organizations (CBOs) that promote the social and emotional welfare of young children and families
- ✓ National and local advocates (e.g. Healthy Schools Campaign, CASEL)

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [Navigating Social and Emotional Learning from the Inside Out: Looking Inside and Across 25 Leading SEL Programs: A Practical Resource for Schools and OST Providers](#) (Wallace Foundation)
- ✓ [SEL in Districts](#) (CASEL)
- ✓ [Social and Emotional Learning Under ESSA](#) (NIEER)

Spotlight on Colorado SEL & Data



Colorado has worked with partners and stakeholders to develop a suite of resources for school leaders, teachers, and families to support understanding about SEL and social skills, including specific metrics for gathering data and disaggregating according to student subgroups.

Check out their resources at colorado.gov/pacific/cssrc/social-emotional-learning.

Spotlight on the CORE Districts, CA: Schools and Districts Support SEL

Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) recently visited middle schools in the CORE districts to learn about the ways educators advance students' social-emotional learning.

Learn about their results in their Facts at a Glance document: [Enacting Social-Emotional Learning: Practices and Supports in CORE Districts and Schools](#).

Addressing Bullying and Harassment

What to Learn from Your State's ESSA Plan

In their State ESSA Plans, states must describe, under Title I, how they will support LEAs and schools to improve “school conditions for student learning” through reducing instances of harassment and bullying.⁷

Guidance for School Improvement

Bullying includes student-on-student harassment on the basis of sex, race, national origin, sexual orientation and gender identity, and disability, as well as any unwanted, aggressive behavior among children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. Increasingly, cyberbullying (bullying online, such as through social media) is also a consideration for schools.⁸

Addressing school climate as a school improvement strategy is the main research-based strategy for reducing incidences of bullying and harassment.⁹ Addressing bullying in this way can include: engagement of families, staff and students about the reality and effects of bullying and cyberbullying; introducing opportunities for students to be involved in special interest groups, hobbies, clubs, or teams; setting up open lines of safe reporting and communication; and training parents, staff, and leaders to model and be able to talk about kindness and appropriate responses when bullying does occur (e.g. implementing restorative practices).

LEA and school leaders can play an important role in addressing bullying, student mental health, and suicide prevention, and will need to work across disciplines and partner with departments of health and health professionals, social services for families and young people (e.g. Medicaid), and rely on the expertise and experience of social workers, school counselors, special education educators, and those closest to students (parents and families, peers) for a complete picture of students' needs and how to support them.

Consider working with outside services like Teenline or Lifeline, or local suicide prevention organizations (e.g. Arizona's La Frontera-EMPACT), working to grow and support school-based students groups (e.g. Gay-Straight Alliance for LGBT Youth) and mentoring programs, and partnering with outside organizations that provide safe spaces for young people (e.g. Big Brothers Big Sisters, faith-based youth groups). Remember, too, that supporting staff and families around their own mental health is an important step toward better supporting students, which your school's social worker can and should support.

Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA

TITLE I, PART A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies

TITLE IV, PART A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants

TITLE IV, PART B: 21st Century Community Learning Centers

7. <http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/education/School-Discipline-Provisions-in-the-Every-Student-Succeeds-Act.pdf>

8. <https://www.meganmeierfoundation.org/cyberbullying-social-media.html>

9. <https://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/at-school/build-safe-environment/index.html>

Essential Stakeholders

- ✓ Students and families, including students with disabilities, English learners, system-involved youth, chronically absent students, students in the foster system or who are experiencing homelessness, students affected by trauma, and others.
- ✓ Educators and educator trainers (e.g. Teachers Unite)
- ✓ Youth development organizations and out-of-school time providers
- ✓ Social media experts
- ✓ Anti-bullying campaign experts
- ✓ Civil rights organizations and community-based organizations (CBOs) that promote the social and emotional welfare of young children and families, including national and local advocates (e.g. Healthy Schools Campaign)

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [School Climate and Bullying Prevention](#) (National School Climate Center)
- ✓ [Stop Bullying—Prevention Resources](#)
- ✓ [Ending Institutionalized Bullying In Our Schools](#) (Desis Rising Up and Moving)

Spotlight on Washington Partnership for Suicide Prevention



The Washington Department of Health works with [Forefront Suicide Prevention in Schools \(FIS\)](#) in high schools across the state. FIS is a three-year program designed to transform school and community culture around suicide. This three-year program begins with building a leadership team at the school site with parents, students, teachers, counselors, and school leaders. These leaders then take the messages back to their own communities (e.g. parent-parent training).

Increasing Nutrition and Food Access

What to Learn from Your State's ESSA Plan

Child nutrition programs, including the school meals programs (the School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program), after-school meals (Child and Adult Care Food Program), and the summer nutrition programs (Summer Food Service Program and National School Lunch Program) are administered at the federal level by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). At the state level, the programs are administered through the department of education, agriculture, or health. Some states have identified increasing access to child nutrition programs as an evidence-based strategy to support learning among students in their state ESSA plans.

Guidance for School Improvement

Participation in the federal child nutrition programs are critical education supports, ensuring that students are well-nourished and able to focus and learn. An extensive body of research demonstrates the negative impact of food insecurity on student outcomes, and the role of the federal nutrition programs in reducing food insecurity. School breakfast, in particular, is linked to improved academic achievement and test scores and reduced absenteeism, tardiness, and behavioral referrals. Best practices to increase access to nutritious food include: serving meals at no cost through the Community Eligibility Provision; offering breakfast after the start of the school day; sponsoring summer meal sites; and offering a snack or a meal to students during after-school educational or enrichment activities.

Additionally, increasing participation in school meals offers a significant opportunity to bring additional federal dollars into the school district. For more information on best practices, visit USDA.gov, FRAC.org, talk with local anti-hunger organizations. To find out what is happening in your district, connect directly with the LEA's school nutrition director.

Addressing Obesity

Nearly all schools are meeting the new nutrition standards for school meals, which means that students are getting more whole grains, more fruits and vegetables, and more lean meats in their school breakfasts and lunches.

Addressing Food Quality

LEAs can take steps to improve the appeal and cultural relevance of the meals served in school breakfast and lunch. The new Smart Snack rules are improving the nutritional quality of the food being sold throughout the school, including in school vending machines. The school wellness policy committee provides an important opportunity to engage on the foods being offered at school. Additionally, tapping into local resources, such as farmers, health providers, grocery stores, food banks, and other food specialists, and engaging experts within the district, such as physical health and science educators and counselor can allow schools to offer nutrition education and to offer more appealing and a wider variety of healthy foods.

Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA

TITLE I, PART A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies

TITLE IV, PART A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants

TITLE IV, PART B: 21st Century Community Learning Centers

TITLE IX, PART A: Homeless Children and Youth

Essential Stakeholders

- ✓ Students and families affected by food hardship
- ✓ Anti-hunger advocacy organizations (local, state)
- ✓ School nutrition director (district), department staff and kitchen director (school)
- ✓ Local Homeless Education Liaisons
- ✓ School board members
- ✓ Superintendent
- ✓ School business officials or budgeting directors (federal USDA reimbursement can support budget)
- ✓ National and state advocacy and membership organizations (e.g. School Nutrition Association)
- ✓ Local food bank
- ✓ Local after-school program operators (Boys and Girls Club, Parks and Rec, and libraries)
- ✓ Local food providers (e.g. grocery store)
- ✓ Teachers union, educators and educator trainers (e.g. Teachers Unite)
- ✓ Physical health professionals (school nurse, hospital, clinic, etc.)

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [ESSA Opportunities to Increase Access to Child Nutrition Programs](#) (Food Research & Action Center)
- ✓ Research Briefs: [Breakfast for Health](#), [Breakfast for Learning & Breakfast for Behavior](#) (FRAC)
- ✓ [Healthy Schools Campaign—Resources](#)



What is Food Insecurity?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a food-insecure household as one in which “access to adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources.” More than 13 million children live in households that are food insecure.

Opportunities for LEAs and school leaders to address food hardship in schools include improving and increasing access to:

- School Meals (breakfast and lunch)
- Summer Food Service Program
- After-school Meals
- Child and Adult Care Food

Spotlight on Oklahoma: Addressing Food Insecurity through ESSA



The Oklahoma State Department of Education, in its ESSA plan, has taken the unique approach of using food as an academic intervention to ensure greater access to the federal school, summer, and afterschool nutrition programs. Its ESSA plan notes the linkage between food security and student achievement and thus has set out specific, measurable goals to ensure that all Oklahoma students — particularly those who need it most — receive food services across the year. It has a goal to increase participation in the Community Eligibility Provision from 34 percent to 75 percent by 2025, increase participation in the School Breakfast Program by 20 percent by 2025, and the Summer Food Service by 30 percent by 2025. In summer 2017 alone, the agency saw an increase of 14 percent in summer meals served.

Aligning and Supporting Early Childhood Education

What to Learn from Your State's ESSA Plan

ESSA offers new flexibility to support early childhood programs for the use of federal funds under Title I, Title II and Title IV, as well as IDEA parts B and C. Each state will have determined whether and how early childhood program access will be developed, expanded, and/or implemented using state and federal funds, and how these decisions will affect districts.

Guidance for School Improvement

LEAs should consider how early education strategies might contribute to an aligned system of supports for children and families across the early years and grades, including: expanded access to early learning, improved transitions into kindergarten, enhanced quality of service, engagement of families, expanded curricular activities, and supporting English learners and children with disabilities.

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-12.¹⁰ Many school districts provide early learning directly, and all districts can partner with local early learning providers to share information on children and families, align standards and expectations, coordinate professional development and supports, and implement systems that support the transition into kindergarten.

Title I funds can be used to add early education classrooms that comply with the federal Head Start Performance Standards.¹¹ Title II funds can be used to support professional opportunities for preschool and early learning educators.

LEAs should look to support joint professional development that:

1. increases the ability of school leaders to support early childhood and elementary educators in meeting the needs of students from birth-age 8, and (2) increases teacher capacity in the early grades, including building educators' knowledge base regarding instruction and strategies to measure how young children are progressing.
2. Title III funds can be used to support early learning professional development to build opportunities for English learners. Title IV funds can be used to provide services like school-based comprehensive educational and family support services for families with preschool age children (e.g. through Child-Parent Centers), expanded program hours through Community School partnerships, "pipeline services" (e.g. support for a child's transition to elementary school), and improved coordination (e.g. using data from the administration of the Early Development Instrument to develop community-wide strategies that support children's health and development across multiple domains).

10. Regenstein, E., Romero-Jurado, R., Cohen, J., and Segal, A. (2014). "Changing the Metrics of Turnaround to Encourage Early Learning Strategies." 4. Ounce of Prevention Fund and Mass Insight Education. <http://www.theounce.org/what-we-do/policy/policy-conversations>; Loeb, S., and Bassok, D. (2007). "Early Childhood and the Achievement Gap." In H.F. Ladd and E.B. Fiske, eds. Handbook of Research in Education Finance and Policy.

11. First Five Years Fund. (January 2017). "What Early Learning in ESSA Can Look Like for States and Districts."

Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA

TITLE I, PART A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies
TITLE I, PART C: Education of Migratory Children
TITLE II, PART A: Supporting Effective Instruction
TITLE III, PART A: English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act
TITLE IV, PART A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants
TITLE IV, PART B: 21st Century Community Learning Centers

Essential Stakeholders

- ✓ Parents and families of young children, including those of differing income levels and/or high-quality learning opportunities.
- ✓ Early learning providers, including 0-3 programs, and center- and home-based childcare providers, including those in English learner and low-income communities, and communities of color
- ✓ Family resource centers and healthcare providers, including pediatricians
- ✓ Local early childhood collaboratives and advocates, including child development experts
- ✓ Home visiting programs
- ✓ Title I, Part C providers for Migrant Youth
- ✓ Kindergarten Readiness and assessment experts
- ✓ Charter Management Organizations (CMO) and charter school leaders

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [What Early Learning in ESSA Can Look Like for States and Districts \(First Five Years Fund\)](#)
- ✓ [Resources on Early Learning & ESSA \(Ounce of Prevention\)](#)
- ✓ [Equity Starts Early: Addressing Racial Inequities in Child Care and Early Education Policy \(CLASP\)](#)
- ✓ [Policy Brief: The State of Early Learning in ESSA: Plans and Opportunities for Implementation \(CCSSO\)](#)

Reducing Chronic Absence

What to Learn from Your State's ESSA Plan

Under ESSA, all states are required to report on chronic absence in local and state report cards and states have the opportunity to include a non-academic indicator in their systems of accountability for schools. The vast majority (36 states plus Washington DC) have chosen to use a chronic absence metric as an accountability metric for school improvement. Learn more about how your state plans to incorporate rates of chronic absence into the new accountability system in your state's ESSA plan, under Title I.

Guidance for School Improvement

Schools and districts can have a significant impact on reducing rates of chronic absence, using a problem-solving, non-punitive approach to school-wide practices and targeted intervention. For example, interventions might include:

- creating a more engaging school environment that ensures every student and family feels welcome,
- helping students and families monitor their own attendance and understand the consequences of lost learning time,
- reducing suspensions by adopting more effective school discipline practices,
- offering additional academic support for students at risk of failing,
- offering additional after school programming (e.g. arts programs),
- addressing transportation access, or
- working with families and community members to address community-specific barriers to attendance.

Large numbers of chronically absence students typically signifies a systemic problem that requires programmatic or policy action. Addressing chronic absence beginning in the early grades is critical to ensuring all children, especially the most vulnerable, have an equal opportunity to learn from what is taught in the classroom.

Schools and districts should ensure that all absences are included in data collection, whether or not this is required at the state level; regardless of reason (suspension, excused absence, partial days), lost instructional time affects student academic performance and dropout rates. Accurate, easy-to-understand, real-time, and comparable data reports are essential to taking action in a timely manner.

Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA

TITLE I, PART A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies
TITLE IV, PART A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants



Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism —typically defined as missing 10 percent or more of the school year — is linked to lower academic proficiency. More than 7 million students in the US are chronically absent.

Learn more at attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/AAM-Policy-Brief-091214-2.pdf.

Sample: Root-cause analysis on chronic absenteeism	
Outcome	Root-Cause Questions
Rate of Chronic Absenteeism for all students, and each student subgroup	<p>For the groups of students most affected by chronic absence, what do you see as the main factors causing them to miss so much school?</p> <p>Do they face major barriers such as chronic illness and lack of access to health care, unreliable transportation, unstable housing, or lack of a safe path to school?</p> <p>Are chronically absent students experiencing negative school experiences related to bullying, ineffective discipline policies, and/or undiagnosed disabilities?</p> <p>Do students lack engaging educational experiences either during or afterschool?</p> <p>What is the rate of engagement of families of chronically absent students?</p> <p>Do students and families understand the impact of absence from school (excused or unexcused)?</p> <p>Additionally, what are the attendance data collection practices in the school and are these practices giving us actionable data?</p>

Essential Stakeholders

- ✓ Students and families of students with low attendance, including those experiencing significant barriers to consistent attendance
- ✓ Teachers and school leaders, as well as other in-school staff and paraprofessionals
- ✓ Public agencies with insights and resources related to health, transportation, housing, and social services
- ✓ Civil rights organizations and community-based organizations focused on additional supports for families and students, including those with significant rates of absence and those at risk of dropping out
- ✓ Early childhood education and childcare providers

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [Portraits of Change: Aligning School and Community Resources to Reduce Chronic Absence](#) (Attendance Works)
- ✓ [The Attendance Imperative: How States Can Advance Achievement by Reducing Chronic Absence](#) (Attendance Works)



Keep in Mind

Chronic absence data is relatively new for most districts. However, more important and actionable than the outcomes data (rates of chronic absence) are the root causes that are specific to your community and students.

Increasing Access to the Arts

What to Learn from Your State's ESSA Plan

Access to arts education varies from state to state, as well as requirements for its inclusion in school curricula. Under ESSA, states may add arts education or training in teaching in the arts to allowable uses for Title I school improvement funds, Title II funding for professional development, and/or Title IV's Student Support and Enrichment Grants.

Guidance for School Improvement

Access to arts education linked to academic achievement, social and emotional development, and positive school climate.¹² Incorporating arts education in school improvement strategy can include offering additional courses, after school programming in the arts, and/or arts integration into existing curricula. LEAs and schools should consider partnering with local non-profits, artists, and arts communities (e.g. theater companies, etc.) to offer opportunities for arts education to all students.

Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA

TITLE I, PART A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies

TITLE I, PART B: Developing Standards and Assessments (including in the arts)

TITLE IV, PART A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants

Essential Stakeholders

- ✓ Students and families, including students of color, students with disabilities, English learners, students experiencing homelessness or foster care, and other subgroups of student identified under the law
- ✓ Teachers and school leaders, including arts educators (e.g. fine arts, drama, dance)
- ✓ Community and nonprofit organizations with a focus on arts education and/or educator training

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [ESSA: Mapping opportunities for the arts](#) (Education Commission of the States)
- ✓ [ESSA and the Arts](#) (Arts Education Partnership)

12. <https://www.edutopia.org/arts-music-curriculum-child-development>

Spotlight on Illinois Arts Accountability Indicator



In response to more than 3,000 comments during their ESSA state plan development process, Illinois put together a committee to develop an arts indicator to be included in their accountability system in 2020. This “Fine Arts” indicator will be weighted for all schools..

Learn more from the Arts Alliance Illinois at artsalliance.org.

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Supporting English Learners

What to Learn from Your State's ESSA Plan

Approximately 1 in 11 public school students is an English learner (EL), a number that has been consistently increasing over the last decade.¹³ To better serve the growing number of EL students, states must fully describe EL data and supports as part of their accountability system. This includes accountability standards around ELs, measuring and reporting EL proficiency at all levels, and standardized processes for identifying and classifying ELs that include criteria for their exit from specialized services. Assessments should also be sensitive to both language and ability (e.g. eligibility for IEP). LEAs and schools will be responsible for implementation of this accountability for ELs, including providing appropriate services and supports (e.g. access to the appropriate native language assessments where the state does not already provide them).

Guidance for School Improvement

With EL accountability now shifted to Title I, districts have more flexible access to funding to support EL students. Additionally, Title III funds may be used to support placement, instruction, assessment, reclassification, professional learning, student support, and family engagement efforts.

LEAs and schools might work with local partners, including other public agencies, to align other resources to support English proficiency and set goals for EL outcomes. This coordination should span a student's academic career, ranging from opportunities in high quality early childhood education to ensuring students have access to quality teachers in K-12. Title I and Title II funds that support teaching and professional development for educators and leaders can also support efforts to increase cultural and language competence for the adults in the building. LEAs must help to build capacity for families to support their children and to become active and welcome stakeholders in the decision-making processes, regardless of language background or ability.

Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA

TITLE I, PART A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies

TITLE I PART C: Education of Migratory Children

TITLE II PART A: Supporting Effective Instruction

TITLE III, PART A: English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act

13. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgf.asp ; <http://www.ideapartnership.org/390-osep-vetting/1514-multi-tiered-systems-of-support-mtss-for-english-language-learner-ell-families-and-practitioners-draft-3-14-11.html>

Essential Stakeholders

- ✓ Parents and families of ELs, including migrant and immigrant students
- ✓ Community/parent bilingual groups
- ✓ Civil rights and community-based organizations and businesses that support EL students and youth (e.g. after school tutoring programs and programs that provide job networking opportunities and social services)
- ✓ Translation services
- ✓ Educators and support personnel who understand the constraints of working with ELs in public schools, and who can provide valuable input on best practices;
- ✓ Agencies that work with families in which English is not a native language and with refugee students and families;
- ✓ Agencies that oversee the correctional system, given the disproportionate number of EL youth that are system-involved.
- ✓ Faith-based communities or organizations

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [NCIIP: English Learners and the Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) (Migration Policy Institute)
- ✓ [English Learner Toolkit for State and Local Education Agencies \(SEAs and LEAs\)](#) (US ED)
- ✓ [“All In” guide for Educators](#) (The National Education Association)



Keep in Mind

LEAs must also take proactive steps to address language and literacy barriers, per Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

Supporting Students with Disabilities

What to Learn from Your State's ESSA Plan

Across the country, more than 6.5 million children and youth receive special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).¹⁴ While separate from ESSA, there is now greater alignment between IDEA and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, now ESSA). Under ESSA, states will be responsible for determining assessment flexibility (DLM-AA) — including assessment development consistent with the principles of universal design for learning, and adjusted graduation rates for those taking this assessment — and other programs that support students with disabilities, including: inclusion of extended graduation rate in the accountability system, identification of students with disabilities as a subgroup, and whether to include students formerly with a disability as a separate, additional subgroup.

Guidance for School Improvement

LEAs and schools have a responsibility to support all students, regardless of disability status. All students must be provided the necessary supports, interventions, and accommodations they need to be successful. This means that school administrators, special education teachers, and other school-based coordinators must work in close collaboration with general education teachers, counselors, social workers, and other on-site personnel to ensure that all students are given the supports they require and are treated in accordance with the requirements of their Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Depending on state decisions, ESSA funding can be used to support students with disabilities in a varied of ways. Schools and districts now have greater opportunity to identify and support the needs of English learners (ELs) and ELs with disabilities through Title I, III, and under IDEA, to emphasize teacher professional development on multi-tiered systems of support and positive behavioral interventions and supports under Title II, and to develop or expand opportunities for improving conditions for teaching and learning (e.g. support for community school partnerships, positive discipline practices, reduction in bullying/harassment) under Title IV.

Under ESSA, LEAs and schools must track and support students with disabilities and ensure that gaps in student academic performance do not persist. Given the number of students included in this group and their varied needs, LEAs and schools should gather and share information about student achievement, classroom and school environments, assessment accommodations, academic and social-emotional growth, and other measures for students with disabilities in order to better address their specific needs. Note that over-representation can be a problem for this group; regular assessment of need and progress is important.

Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA

TITLE I, PART A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies

TITLE III, PART A: English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act

14. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp

Essential Stakeholders

- ✓ Students and families of students with a variety of abilities, including parent groups such as the PTA, Parents Education Network, or the Parent Training Institute
- ✓ Members of the IEP or Child Study team
- ✓ Special Education teachers
- ✓ Social emotional or specialized instructional support personnel
- ✓ School climate or discipline experts (e.g. Center for Restorative Process)
- ✓ Disability rights organizations, advocates, and service providers (e.g. National Center for Learning Disabilities, Council for Exceptional Children)
- ✓ Physical and mental health professionals, including school nurses, psychologists and counselors
- ✓ Data collection agencies (e.g. KidsCount)

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [ESSA Parent Advocacy Toolkit](#) (The National Center for Learning Disabilities)
- ✓ [Tools for ESSA & Students with Disabilities](#) (AIR)

Highlighted Resource

Find Your Parent Center



Supports parent and family resources for students with disabilities, found at parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center.

Supporting Students in Foster Care and Experiencing Homelessness

What to Learn from Your State's ESSA Plan

ESSA adds homeless youth and children in foster care as an identified subgroup for state-level accountability. With this new addition, states will determine how to best collect new and/or better information around youth experiencing homelessness or foster care, including standards for their identification and support. Many states have systems set up under the McKinney Vento Act that dictate standards for its implementation at the local level. Check with state leaders to learn more about any changes to these systems under the new ESSA state plan.

Guidance for School Improvement

Under the Title I and McKinney-Vento Act's Homeless Children and Youth programs, LEAs are responsible for appointing liaisons to address the barriers homeless students may face to receiving a quality education (e.g., policies related to missed enrollment deadlines, accruing partial or full course credits, fees or fines related to extracurricular or academic activities, absences, etc.). Liaisons must inform students pursuing postsecondary education of the independent financial aid filing status and must ensure those impacted by homelessness receive the appropriate health and human service referrals (mental, housing, substance abuse, etc.). Additionally, any LEA receiving Title I funds are now required to ensure school access and the educational stability of foster care students. They must also reserve dollars to support the needs of homeless students and include their disaggregated academic achievement data as part of annual report cards.

Using the annual reporting of the academic achievement of children and youth experiencing homelessness, local leaders can better understand and keep track of the challenges facing these students and strengthen relationships with child welfare agencies and other youth-serving organizations to address them. ESSA allows LEAs to use Title I funds for services that support students impacted by homelessness or foster youth, such as transportation and funding additional local liaisons. LEAs and schools should also clarify with stakeholders the district role in protecting the rights of homeless students under FERPA and IDEA.

Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA

TITLE I PART D: Prevention and Intervention Programs for Children and Youth
who are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk

TITLE IX, PART A: Homeless Children and Youth



Students Experiencing Homelessness

Youth experience homelessness for a number of reasons:

- youth asked to leave home
- youth who run away from home
- youth who age out of or run away from foster care or juvenile justice systems
- youth without a legal guardian
- youth sleeping in non-traditional areas
- youth in families experiencing homelessness (including those in transitional or temporary housing)
- youth living in any home that is not their own (e.g. motel, emergency shelter, family acquaintance)

Given that a higher number of youth experiencing homelessness are part of marginalized communities—such as those with mental health needs, foster youth, or LGBT youth—working with student support organizations, health facilities, community adult leaders (e.g. religious leaders, youth partnership leaders) and community groups that support such young people will help to reach students and families with specific needs. Families experiencing homelessness are often experiencing crisis events, such as domestic violence or financial crisis. Districts and schools might work with crisis partners to better determine overarching community needs — as well as individual case management — and develop adequate responses (e.g. support family travel to and from outreach events).

Essential Stakeholders

- ✓ Students and families impacted by homelessness or involved with foster care services
- ✓ Local liaisons
- ✓ School staff (counselors or advisors, social workers, teachers, principals)
- ✓ Families and community organizations that serve homeless populations (e.g. YWCA, local shelters)
- ✓ Tribal child welfare agencies and staff
- ✓ Foster care agencies
- ✓ Local agencies (child protection and job and family services) and tribes
- ✓ Court appointed special advocates
- ✓ Parent and family mentor groups, as well as students/families who have previously or are currently impacted by homelessness
- ✓ Community centers, including faith-based organizations
- ✓ National advocates [e.g. School Superintendents Association (AASA), National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, School Social Workers (SSWAA)]

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [Technical Assistance Tools](#) (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth)
- ✓ [Homeless Liaison Toolkit | 2017 Edition](#) (NCHE)
- ✓ [Integrated Service Settings Open Doors for Youth Experiencing Homelessness](#) (SAMHSA)

Supporting Teachers and Leaders

What to Learn from Your State's ESSA Plan

Broadly, ESSA brings more focus to educator equity and improving teaching practice while providing greater flexibility to how LEAs apply Title funding. LEAs also have more flexibility with Title II-A funds. While the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era requirement of “highly qualified teachers” no longer applies,¹⁵ Educator Equity data — the distribution of ineffective, out-of-field, and inexperienced teachers in high-poverty and high-minority schools versus low-poverty schools and low-minority schools — must still be tracked and reported. Many states and LEAs have identified strategies, resources and implementation timelines to address these educator equitable access challenges. Learn more about Educator Equity and statewide programs under Title II in your ESSA state plan.

Guidance for School Improvement

ESSA addresses many of the resource and access disparities some districts face by providing funding under Titles I and II. Using these levers, LEAs will be positioned to strengthen culturally appropriate professional development opportunities; improve attraction, development and retention programs; strengthen, develop, and/or implement stronger evidence-based teacher and principal evaluation systems; and provide providing high-quality, personalized professional development to educators to meets the needs of early childhood and children affected by trauma or other barriers to student learning. ESSA also supports district partnerships with nonprofit organizations and educator/leader preparation programs. Such partnerships can support culturally relevant and site-specific professional development.

Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA

TITLE I, PART A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies

TITLE II PART A: Supporting Effective Instruction

TITLE V, PART B, Subpart 2: Rural and Low-Income School Program

¹⁵ Under NCLB, a highly qualified teacher meant having: “1) a bachelor’s degree, 2) full state certification or licensure, and 3) prove that they know each subject they teach.” Beyond that, NCLB did not define its terminology, and left requirements around demonstration of competency and teacher quality goals up to states.

Essential Stakeholders

- ✓ Teachers across subject and grade level, including retired teachers and teachers of student subgroups with particular needs, such as students with disabilities, English learners, migrant students, students in foster care or who are impacted by homelessness, system-involved youth, student parents, and others.
- ✓ Local union representatives (NEA, AFT, or other), and other teacher groups (e.g. TFA, Educators for Excellence)
- ✓ Childcare providers and early learning practitioners and leaders
- ✓ Students and families, including parent-teacher groups (PTA and others), and student organizations
- ✓ Charter teacher alliances and substitute teachers
- ✓ Teacher preparation program leadership and others involved in educator evaluation
- ✓ School personnel, including social/emotional support staff
- ✓ Principal teams and associations (e.g. the National Associations of Elementary and Secondary School Principals, the Association of School Administrators, State Indian Education Associations)

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [Teacher Assessment and Evaluation: The National Education Association’s Framework for Transforming Education Systems to Support Effective Teaching and Improve Student Learning](#) (National Education Association)
- ✓ [Teacher Professional Learning Diagnostic Assessment: Does your school system have the conditions and practices in place to support Connected Professional Learning?](#) (Education Resource Strategies)
- ✓ [Leveraging ESSA to Build Professional Learning Systems](#) (EducationCounsel, LLC, Learning Forward)

Highlighted Resources

What Is a Professional Learning Community?



The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development explores the value and core standards of an effective professional learning community, rooting professional learning in student outcomes and a culture of collaboration in service of student learning.

Learn more at ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may04/vol61/num08/What-Is-a-Professional-Learning-Community%C2%A2.aspx

What are states doing to improve professional development?

[Interactive State Map: Examples of Initiatives Elevating the Teaching Profession](#) (Center for American Progress)