LOCAL ESSA IMPLEMENTATION
Guidance for Engaging on School Improvement
Welcome

Agenda:

• Engagement and ESSA:
  Where are we today?

• New Resources:
  What is in the Handbooks and how to use them

• Voice from the Field:
  Hearing from the New Jersey Department of Education

• Q & A
ESSA and Engagement

- Where are states in the process of ESSA implementation?
- What do local leaders need from their state leaders?
- How do these resources speak to that need?
New Resources

These **Handbooks** are designed to support state leaders in developing and sharing resources for their districts around school improvement.
New Resources

Issue 1:
• School improvement planning process
• Engagement with specific stakeholder groups

Issue 2:
• Engagement on specific school improvement strategies

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Partners for Each and Every Child
a project of the Opportunity Institute
How to Use the Handbooks

• Use them with state-specific information

• Use them in partnership

• Use the sections/pieces that are most relevant to you
  • School improvement strategies
  • Engagement with specific groups
  • More information from the experts
How to Use the Handbooks
https://oppin.st/Handbook2

Download the Handbook Components:

Download By Strategy:
Engaging on School Improvement

Choose from the following strategies according to what will best support your communities and students — especially those that need the most support.

- Engagement as a School Improvement Strategy
- A Whole Child Framework
  - Improving Data Systems and Reporting
  - Restructuring Academic Assessments
  - Incorporating Technology in the Classroom
- Working With Your Communities
  - Engaging on Needs Assessments and Priority-Building
Sample Pages:

Working with Stakeholder Groups

Parents, Guardians, and Families

Children and youth grow up in many different family structures, and those structures often change over time. One of the most important lessons for educators and school leaders is to recognize each student’s family as a valuable asset, and to treat each family with respect and understanding.

Engage with families of all students living on or near your schools. Be prepared to engage with underserved groups, including families of students with a variety of disabilities (e.g., learning and behavioral), families of English learners, students who are former refugees, Denver Public Schools youth, and members of Multicultural families.

Engage with families can be the most effective way to understand student needs, particularly to support innovative ideas for students and classrooms, determine all school or community resources, or build resources for school and family relationships.

Effective Engagement Strategies

There are numerous proven strategies that schools can use to strengthen their relationships with parents and guardians and engage them in meaningful discussions around ESVA and equity. Some examples, suggested by the National PTA, include:

- Invite families to participate: Many families do not feel welcome or know that ESVA requires that states and districts involve them in the development of the new education plans. Education leaders should utilize a variety of communication channels to reach out to parents and share with them ways they can get involved. Education leaders can also rely on a trusted messenger—such as the PTA, or other local, community-based education advocates—to share information about the ESVA implementation process with families. Ways to engage families might include family visiting, family workshops, and training and empowerment activities. Where possible, use existing family engagement opportunities such as parent-teacher conferences, advisory nights, or student events where families are invited. Additionally, take home supports can promote literacy, critical thinking, numeracy, creativity, and parent/caregiver engagement.

- Make messages to parents easy to digest: ESVA-related materials must be provided in simple and readable formats. At the least basic level, parents want to know how ESVA affects their child, their education and school, and what they can do. Resources should be no longer than 2 pages, however 1-2 pages are ideal. Other materials should be used to provide clear and concise information to parents and families. Consider the messenger: use community leadership and family ambassadors to engage with families to build trust and foster ongoing relationships.

Part 2: Making Engagement More Effective

- Translate materials to reach all families: It is essential that ESVA-related materials are translated into at least one of the most commonly spoken languages other than English in a school community. Materials should also be made accessible to work parents with a disability. Although these extra steps take time and resources, doing so demonstrates a commitment to ensuring all parents are able to access the information they need to support their child’s learning and development.

- Demonstrate why family participation matters: If families are excluded in all stages of the ESVA implementation process, they will understand how it relates not only to their child, but to every child in the community, the state and the nation. Mechanisms need to be put in place for parents to provide regular, ongoing feedback, and whether or not they agree, education decision makers need to show that they are hearing when parents share their thoughts.

Top Resources:

- A Guide to Engaging Families at ESVA (National PTA)
- District Family Engagement Policy Toolkit (Scholastic Family and Community Engagement)
- Family-School Community Partnerships 2.0: Collaborative Strategies to Advance Student Learning (Priority Schools Campaign, USA)
- Safety Engagement in ESVA (in Spanish) (National PTA)

State Spotlights:

Ohio: Building Family Partnerships

Ohio’s Partnership for Building Partnerships Among Schools, families and Communities is a biennial conference that helps school counselors and testing relationships with families. It provides training and support for developing family engagement plans within their existing communication structures. It includes assessment tools, strategies, and descriptions of active roles that education, families, and community members can take to strengthen the connection between home and school.

Learn more at education.ohio.gov/Pages/OH-state-resources/family-and-community-engagement

Delaware: PTA Engagement

In October 2020, the Delaware Department of Education and the Delaware PTA hosted a forum for families to provide input into the state ESVA plan. They provided materials to home schools, and invited input at the meeting and via email through a feedback form with open-ended questions.

Learn more at delawarepta.org/inventories/community-conversations-3

Alaska: Supporting Homeless Youth

With a school change, every time a child transitions from one home to another they lose their educational records. They may not know what class or school they are in, their education and school, and what they can do. Resources should be no longer than 2 pages, however 1-2 pages are ideal. Other materials should be used to provide clear and concise information to parents and families. Consider the messenger: use community leadership and family ambassadors to engage with families to build trust and foster ongoing relationships.

Learn more: education.alaska.gov/esa/title-6
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 of 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 absent students typically signify 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, extended absence, part-time enrollment), last 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 U.S. are chronically absent. Learn more at attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/AAM-Policy-0912H-2.pdf.

Sample: Root cause analysis on chronic absenteeism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Root Cause Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate of Chronic Absenteeism for all students, and each student subgroup</td>
<td>For the group of students most affected by chronic absenteeism, what do you see as the main factors contributing to them missing so much school? 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? Are chronically absent students experiencing negative school experiences related to bullying, ineffective discipline policies, and/or undiagnosed disabilities? Do students lack engaging educational experiences other than school? What is the rate of engagement of families of chronically absent students? Do students and families understand the impact of absence from school on their future or their school? Additionally, what are the attendance data collection practices in the school and are these practices giving us actionable data?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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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 para-educators
- 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

- Principles of Change: Aligning School and Community Resources to Reduce Chronic Absence (Attendance Works)
- The Attendance Initiative: 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.
From the Field

- Stakeholder Input
- Customizing these resources
  - State ESSA Plan Overview
  - New Jersey School Improvement
  - New Jersey District Examples
- What’s next for New Jersey
Please type your questions into the “chat” box
Thank you!

Questions? Email Sophie Green: Sophie@TheOpportunityInstitute.org