

ENGAGE FOR EQUITY

A Toolkit for School Communities
on the Every Student Succeeds Act





Thank you to Our Contributors

Action Communication Education Reform
Activists with a Purpose
Blue Ribbon Youth Leadership Institute
Citizens for a Better Greenville
Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children
Girls for Gender Equity, Inc.
Gwinnett SToPP
The Leadership Conference Education Fund
Midwest Center for School Transformation and Solutions Not Suspensions Coalition
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
National Economic & Social Rights Initiative
National Urban League
Nollie Jenkins Family Center
Parent Education Organizing Council
Parents for Public Schools
Partners *for* Each and Every Child, a project of the Opportunity Institute
Paterson Education Fund
Racial Justice NOW!
Southern Echo, Inc.
Student Advocacy Center of Michigan
Sunflower County Parents & Students United (SCPSU)
The Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC)
Tunica Teens in Action (TTIA)
United Parent Leadership Action Network (UPLAN)
Woman of God's Design
Youth on Board



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Join Us!

A Message from the Authors

About The Toolkit:

The Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC), *Partners for Each and Every Child*, a project of the Opportunity Institute, and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. developed the Toolkit to serve as a call to action and to **empower parents, families, care-givers, students, and other community members** with the information and tools they need to be actively involved in making decisions that impact their schools.

Who is The Toolkit For?

This set of tools is intended to support organizers—including families and students—as they work with their school communities to understand and engage around the ***Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)***.

Why Now?

Our students need more from their schools.

- **Our public school children are increasingly high-need:** *51% of our nation's public school children are living in poverty, yet funding to support their increasing needs is low.¹ In fact, high-poverty districts spend 15.6 % less per student than low-poverty districts do.²*
- **Integration in schools by race and class is declining:** *latino/a students—now the largest minority group in the U.S.—are now the most segregated.³*
- **Gaps in our support for students are increasing:** *black students are suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than white students.⁴*
- **Thus, achievement gaps persist:** *in both math and reading, 87% of white students in grade 12 scored ahead of the average black 12th grader.⁵*
- **ESSA's requirements and funding can help us move forward:** *Title I funding alone supports over 21 million students in more than 56,000 schools in the U.S.⁶*

1. [Majority of U.S. public school students are in poverty](#) (Washington Post, 2015)
2. [Good School, Rich School; Bad School, Poor School](#) (The Atlantic, 2016)
3. [Report: School Segregation Is Back, 60 Years After "Brown"](#) (PBS, 2014)

4. [Achievement gap is our fault, not the kids'](#) (The Baltimore Sun, 2017)
5. [Racial/Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools](#) (NCES, 2017)
6. [NCES Fast Facts: Title I](#)





Why ESSA?


Nearly two years ago, Congress passed the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA)—an update to the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB)—that provides state governments with a vision of success for every student, especially those who need the most. This new law provides several opportunities for states, districts, and schools to ensure that all students have access to the crucial resources they need to be successful. It also requires that families, students, and community members be a part of the process for improving and expanding opportunities for all students.

It is critical that we all play a key role in the decision-making process. Our communities are directly impacted by these decisions and are in the best position to determine what will work for our schools and students. ESSA offers us the opportunity to look at how we are serving students and what we can do to move toward greater equity and justice for our children—**together**.

Who are the Authors?

 **DIGNITY IN SCHOOLS** | **The Dignity in Schools Campaign** (DSC) is a coalition of over 100 grassroots and education advocacy organizations in 29 states. Since its inception in 2006, DSC members have worked to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline by challenging the systemic problem of unfair school discipline policies that push students out of our nation's schools and by advocating for high-quality educational environments that keep students in school and learning.

 **LDF**
DEFEND. EDUCATE. EMPOWER | Founded in 1940 by Thurgood Marshall, the **NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.** (LDF) is the nation's oldest civil rights law organization. For almost 80 years, LDF has relied on the Constitution and federal and state civil rights laws to pursue equality and justice for African-Americans and other people of color.

 **Partners for Each and Every Child** | A project of the Opportunity Institute, **Partners for Each and Every Child** (Partners for) is a collaborative, nonpartisan network of education researchers, advocacy organizations, and policy experts who are committed to educational excellence for each and every child. Partners for works to advance sound educational policies that are responsive to the needs of at-risk, under-served, and politically underrepresented students.

Together, we urge you to use the information in this resource to take a seat at the table and make your voices heard!

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I. Equity & The Every Student Succeeds Act: Organizer's Packet

Core background material for organizers to get started

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Who is Part of a School Community?

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

Education Governance

District, Regional, State, or National Governing Agencies & Advocates

School Community

Community Centers, Local Businesses, Health Organizations, Programs for Families and Youth

In-School Staff, Health Professionals, & Youth Program Leaders

Parents, Families, Care-Givers, Mentors, & Peers

Students

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



A Vision for Our Children

- ▶ **Our school communities have the potential to make sure all children have everything they need to succeed: great teachers, principals, and mentors, and access to excellent services and educational opportunities.** These might include:
 - **great teachers**, thoughtful school administrators, and other excellent support staff, as well as ongoing training to support continual learning for staff and leadership;
 - **support for families**, including parent organizing & leadership, classes, and regular access to the school's leadership and classrooms;
 - **opportunities for high quality learning** for all children, birth through 12th grade;
 - **access to nutrition and healthcare**, including healthy meals, physical education and recess, and mental health services;
 - **positive discipline practices**, like Restorative Justice practices, reduced suspensions, or reduced presence of police in schools; and
 - **advanced and creative coursework**, including implementing a culturally relevant and culturally responsive curriculum, adding courses like arts and civics, or providing internship opportunities.
- ▶ The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is just one tool for us to refocus our efforts to move toward equity and justice for all students: **education is a human right!**

What is the Every Student Succeeds Act?

- ▶ The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) is the most recent version of our country's **primary federal law for public education** from Pre-K through grade 12, called the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA). From 2001 until ESSA became law, it was known as the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB).
- ▶ Congress first passed the ESEA in 1965, signed by President Lyndon Johnson as part of his War on Poverty agenda during the Civil Rights Movement.
- ▶ This was the first time the federal government provided **comprehensive education funding** to states—specifically to support students from low-income families.
- ▶ With federal funding came requirements for how to use it, including how to measure school quality. Congress has revised those requirements several times, most recently by **passing ESSA in December 2015**.



What's New in ESSA?

- ▶ ESSA gives state governments more **flexibility** to decide how to measure student performance and school quality. For example, ESSA requires that all states adopt “challenging academic standards,” but allows states to choose what those standards will be.
- ▶ In exchange for that flexibility, ESSA requires that state and local government leaders **engage** with their communities to make decisions that best fit their needs. (See page 37 for more)
- ▶ ESSA has kept in place a number of important policies and opportunities that matter to our country as a whole, including tracking how students are doing academically, looking at the gaps in performance among groups of students, and **making sure that those who need support receive it**.



See page 28 for more detail about the components of ESSA

State ESSA Plans

- ▶ The first round of decisions under ESSA have happened at the state level, where state leaders already worked with the larger state education community to develop **state ESSA plans**, which outline how states plan to meet the requirements of the law.

What is in a State ESSA Plan?

- ▶ **Engagement** with communities around decisions
- ▶ **Standards** for what children should learn in each grade
- ▶ **Assessments** for finding out if children have met those standards
- ▶ Long-term **goals** for schools and students
- ▶ A way to **measure** if schools are on track to meet those goals
- ▶ A system of **support** for all schools, especially those that are struggling the most



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

What Does ESSA Mean for My School?

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



While working with school community members, check out the [Fact Sheet: The Every Student Succeeds Act](#) on page 19.

A Timeline of ESSA's Local Impact

All states have submitted their ESSA plans to the U.S. Department of Education, following two years of working with communities to answer the important questions asked in ESSA. Decisions made by the state will now be implemented at the local level. **What can you expect?**

April/May or September/October 2017

States submitted their ESSA plans

School Year 2017-18

Schools and districts collect data/information about schools and students.

States communicate with the state education community about expectations.

June 2018

Districts submit Title I funding applications to the state

Summer 2018

Schools must communicate their ratings to families/communities

June, Every Year

Districts submit applications for federal funds (e.g. Title I) to the state

By Winter 2018

U.S. Department of Education (US ED) reviews and approves ESSA state plans

End of School Year 2017-18

States Identify schools for Comprehensive or Targeted Support & Improvement based on the state rating system



School Year 2018-19, ongoing: **School Improvement**

Districts/schools engage with their communities and write local improvement or strategic plans. Starting in 2019,¹ districts/schools implement their improvement plans.

School Year 2019-20, ongoing

States identify new or additional schools for Comprehensive or Targeted Support and Improvement, and re-identify schools based on whether they have met exit criteria

Use this page at a meeting: cut it out, copy, and share!

¹ Some states will not begin implementation of local plans until the 2020-21 school year

What Is School Improvement?

- ▶ **School improvement** is the process of learning about a community and working to make it better for all students. **School improvement means student success.**
- ▶ School improvement requires that district and school administrators and communities—including students and families—**work together.**



School Improvement Planning Under ESSA

- ▶ Under ESSA, there are **three main processes** for school improvement:

Comprehensive or Targeted Support and Improvement Plans

- ✓ Required for schools identified by the state as low-performing

Learn More: Check out your [state's ESSA plan](#)



Funding Applications & Consolidated Local ESSA Plans

- ✓ Required by all districts with schools receiving federal funds

Learn More: Check out the US ED website: ed.gov/ESSA



Local Strategic Planning

- ✓ Not required for all districts or schools in all states

Learn More: Check out your state's ESSA plan, strategic plan, and other state law



- ▶ These three processes may be three parts of the same document, or be entirely separate efforts. No matter the format, **they should be connected and aligned.**
- ▶ Keep in mind that **school improvement processes are different school to school and district to district**, as well as for charter schools, alternative schools, and schools in “turnaround,” which may include mayor’s, governor’s, or other state office involvement.



For a deeper dive with school community members, check out the [Fact Sheet: School Improvement Under ESSA](#) on page 21.



Find out if your school has been identified as low performing—called “Comprehensive” or “Targeted Support and Improvement” schools under ESSA—by checking your school’s [report card](#), starting in Summer 2018. You can find report cards on your state education department’s website.

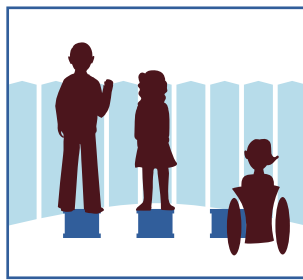
It's Your *Right* to Be Involved

What is Stakeholder Engagement?

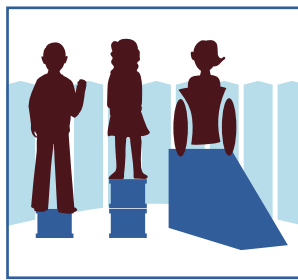
- ▶ Under ESSA, state and local officials are required to engage with community members around decisions that impact schools and students. Meaningful **Stakeholder Engagement** is a process of communicating, learning, and partnering with school communities that acknowledges the unique needs and strengths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

What is Equity?

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



Equality



Equity



Justice: No Barriers

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

Engagement for Equity:



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



For a deeper dive with school community members, check out the [Fact Sheet: School Improvement Under ESSA](#) on page 21.



For more about engagement at the school level, check out our Handout: [What Does an Engaged School Community Look Like?](#) on page 37 of this document.

Use the next 4 pages at a meeting: cut them out, copy, and share!

Getting Involved in School Improvement

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



For a deeper dive with school community members, print and share:

- [Needs Assessments](#) on page 23,
- [School Improvement Strategies: What Can You Advocate For?](#) on page 33,
- [School Improvement Strategies: Write it Down](#) on page 34, and
- Examples of meaningful engagement in action on pages 39 and 40!



Take Action!

1. Learn and Share — Find out how your school and school community are doing, and share that information with your communities.

Where to Start:

- ✓ **Check out your school's report card.** Report cards are available online, and can usually be found on your state education department website. Report cards contain information about your school and district that is collected statewide, like demographic data about students.
- ✓ **Find more information about your district and state online** through the federal [Civil Rights Data Collection](#) (CRDC); national foundations, like the Annie E. Casey Foundation's [Kids Count Data Center](#); and advocacy groups like the Education Trust and the Dignity in Schools Campaign.
- ✓ **Build coalitions** and collaborative relationships to build up the community's voice.
- ✓ **Help to package and distribute information** to families and students: distribute flyers; develop email or social media campaigns; or host a Q&A with your school community.
- ✓ **As you advocate for change, advocate for accurate and actionable information!**

Moving Forward:

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



Check out [Needs Assessments](#), page 23 for more!



2. Set Goals — Decide what you want your students and school communities to learn, experience, and achieve.

Where to Start:

- ✓ Look in your state's ESSA plan for state goals for all students and student subgroups (e.g. low-income students). Help your community **understand how these goals apply** to your school.
- ✓ **Co-host family input meetings** to share the state goals, as well as and the school goals (see: school handbook) and update them to better reflect what the school community wants.
- ✓ Help community members to turn their **broad vision into actionable next steps** for a school to take, and help school and district administrators connect current data to long-term goals.

Moving Forward:

- ✓ Your goals can and should change over time. Support regular meetings to **revisit and update your goals** to accommodate changes in your school's performance and the needs of your students.



Take Action!

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

Where to Start:

- ✓ **Learn what strategies are available** and relevant to your school community. *Check out [School Improvement Strategies: What Can You Advocate For?](#), page 33 for more!*
- ✓ Work with local community groups and national advocates to **build a menu of possible programs and strategies for school improvement**, and speak with families, in-school staff, and other community members about their vision for how these programs might work.
- ✓ **Engage directly with school and district administrators** to push for the practices and policies you want.
- ✓ **Collaborate with other community organizers** to raise funds and implement programs outside of schools (e.g. afterschool literacy workshop at your local library).



Moving Forward:

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

4. Write it Down — Once you have determined which strategies to focus on, seek out and help school and district officials to write down these ideas into action.

Where to Start:

- ✓ Your school community's goals and priorities, as well as the strategies used to improve, should be **written in the places that matter most**: funding applications, local strategic plans or school improvement plans (ESSA), and school handbooks or mission statements (like on the school website). Write sample language and meet with school and district officials to make sure this happens! *For more about what you can affect and who is responsible for each planning process, see [School Improvement Strategies: What Can You Advocate For?](#) on page 33!*

- ✓ Help to ensure that **priorities match budgets** by working with your local school board.
- ✓ **Talk to other families, students, and the school's leadership** to find out what funding is most needed and help school and community leaders secure additional grants for ambitious projects.

Moving Forward:

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



Take Action!

5. Make it Happen — Recruit and inform community members, and work together to implement the programs and strategies that you have chosen.

Where to Start:

- ✓ As with every step in this process, **see yourself as an organizer.** Help new community members be a part of the process by sharing what you have done to-date and helping them to see how they can be a part of the process moving forward.
- ✓ **Show up** on school campuses to take tours, talk with students and staff, and to see the school facilities. Help students to know that their community is present and caring.
- ✓ **Volunteer or work at the school site:** Ask your school administrators what would be most helpful, or offer your talents directly (e.g. work with a teacher, volunteer as an assistant coach, or help to decorate the teachers' lounge with relevant literature each month).
- ✓ **Join your school's leadership teams** like school site councils, stakeholder engagement teams, teacher leadership committees, etc. If a team is full or does not exist, consider creating a peer leadership role for yourself or others to develop a stronger voice and a body ready for action where needed.
- ✓ **Work together.** The strongest coalitions are intersectional - demonstrate solidarity for our human right to education through collective action!



Grow Your Community!

This process is ongoing, and there are many opportunities to begin again or to jump in mid-way through. As an organizer, it is your job to help community members get involved in every part. That means helping newcomers understand what has come before, and finding new leadership roles, action steps, and concrete ways to get involved. ***When working with your community, share What Does and Engaged Community Look Like? on page 37 to spark discussion.***



Moving Forward:

- ✓ Engagement, like organizing, is not one-and-done. Our students need sustained support to continue to meet their varied and changing needs. **Commit to staying involved**, and help others to do the same. ***For examples of meaningful engagement in action, read stories of success in New York and Ohio on pages 39 and 40!***



For more on school improvement organizing, check out The Leadership Conference Education Fund's [ESSA Guide for Advocates \(2017\)](https://www.civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/education/ESSA/ESSA-Guide.pdf) at [civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/education/ESSA/ESSA-Guide.pdf](https://www.civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/education/ESSA/ESSA-Guide.pdf)





Take Action!

6. Evaluate — Measure how strategies or programs are working.

Where to Start:

- ✓ **Find a trusted messenger** to give you the information you are looking for. Program leaders (e.g. school nurse, counselor, or social worker) may have the most recent and relevant information about attendance, involvement, and outcomes.
- ✓ **Look at data** from multiple months or years to find trends in improvement. Be honest about what is and is not working. Share out what you learn to other families and community members.

Moving Forward:

- ✓ Make sure that it is clear to all community members when and how to engage. Help to connect process to outcomes: show what is working over time, and help community members to support those successful efforts.



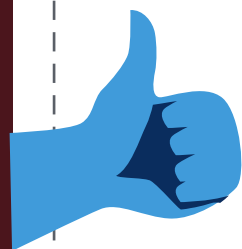
7. Make Changes to Get Better — Make efforts over time to change and improve

Where to Start:

- ✓ Set aside time to **visit schools, talk with other students, families, and staff**, and make an effort to build your understanding over time.
- ✓ Organize community meetings to **review new information** and data and discuss any changes and what improvements are needed, be involved in recruitment efforts for new staff, hold or take part in trainings for existing staff, and keep your community up to date with new research, etc.
- ✓ Help to **connect families and school staff with the right change-makers** going forward.

Moving Forward:

Use the next page to add your own **Ideas for Action!**



Take Action!

Ideas for Action:



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





II. Toolkit Resources

These are materials to support engagement efforts.
Choose what works for you!

School Improvement Worksheets:

Students: Take Action! _____	17
<i>Coming Soon! Family Engagement in ESSA</i>	

ESSA Fact Sheets:

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Use this 2-sided page at a meeting: cut it out, copy, and share!

Students: Take Action!

Students: Use this worksheet to start thinking about how you can get involved in your school's leadership and become an active decision-maker and organizer!

- ▶ **Start by talking to your peers and the leaders you trust**—including teachers, counselors, and families—about the things that matter most to you. Learn about what is already available. Think about what's missing and what resources could help improve your school.
- ▶ **Visit your school's principal** and/or office administrators, teachers, counselors, or aides. Find out what the timeline is for local planning – who is making decisions about the school vision, programs, and budget and when?
- ▶ **Ask for a seat on leadership committees** or teams that work on these issues (e.g. your school's improvement plan team, local school board, parent or family action committees, or student government).
- ▶ **Set up a tour of a neighboring school** within or outside of your district by working with your teachers and principal. Visiting another school can give you ideas about what other schools are doing differently.
- ▶ **Talk to community organizations, local businesses, and other community program leaders** (e.g. libraries, health clinics) to find out how they might link up with schools to build on-site offices, partner with teachers for class projects, or provide internship opportunities.
- ▶ **Help build momentum** around something you care about by doing research and talking with other students about how it benefits them (better nutrition improves a student's ability to learn!). Then share that information:
 - ▶ Request a meeting to discuss with your principal, leadership team, or PTA/PTO
 - ▶ Make flyers to post around school and in the community
 - ▶ Hold an information session to share what you know
 - ▶ Present at a local school board meeting



Student Involvement in ESSA

Ideas for Action:



#1 *What matters most to you about your school? About yourself? What do you wish were true about your school?*

#2 *Who can you talk to about these issues? List at least 3 people you can meet with this week, and what you will ask about and share:*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

#3 *In conversations with school leaders and staff, try asking the following questions, and add your own:*

1. *What programs are available for me that I might not know about?*
2. *What leadership committees are there at this school? In this school district? How can I help or participate?*
3. *I really care about (see answer to #1) - What can we do to make that happen?*
- 4.
- 5.

#4 *What community centers might also have programs or information that you want? List at least three places (e.g., library):*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



Fact Sheet: The Every Student Succeeds Act

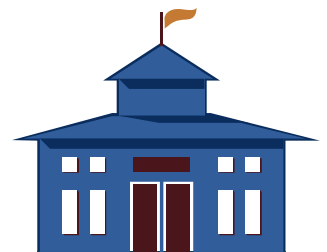
Use this handout to begin talking with other organizers and community members about ESSA and what it means for your community.

What is ESSA?

- ▶ *The Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) is the most recent version of our country's primary federal law for public education from PreK through 12th grade.
- ▶ This law is the main way that the federal government provides education funding to states - specifically to support students from low-income families.
- ▶ With federal funding come requirements for how to use that funding, including how to measure school quality.

What is in a State ESSA Plan?

- ▶ ESSA became law in December 2015. Since then, state education agencies have been developing **state ESSA plans**.
- ▶ State ESSA plans describe how each state will meet the requirements of the law, which include:
 - ✓ **Engagement** with communities around decisions
 - ✓ **Standards** for what children should learn in each grade
 - ✓ **Assessments** for finding out if children have met those standards
 - ✓ Long-term **goals** for schools and students
 - ✓ A way to **measure** if schools are on track to meet those goals
 - ✓ A system of **support** for all schools, especially those that are struggling the most
- ▶ For more details, check out [CheckStatePlans.org](https://www.checkstateplans.org)





Fact Sheet: The Every Student Succeeds Act

What Does ESSA Mean for My School?

- ▶ Every state's ESSA plan also describes a process for **schools and districts to write their own plans** for how they will support students and improve schools over time.
- ▶ These plans will describe what programs schools will use to improve outcomes for students—like recruiting great teachers, improving school meals and nutrition, adding additional course options (e.g. civics, graphic design), improving discipline practices (e.g. starting a restorative practices program, eliminating suspensions) or offering internship opportunities.
- ▶ **Students, families, organizers, and in-school staff can be a part of the process to decide what is best for your school!**

How Do I Get Involved?

- ▶ **Start by talking to your peers and the leaders you trust**, including teachers, counselors, and families, about the things that matter most to you. Learn about what is already available. Think about what's missing and what resources could help improve your school.
- ▶ **Contact your school's principal** and/or administrative staff. Find out what the timeline is for local planning – who is making decisions about the school vision, programs, and budget and when?
- ▶ **Ask for a seat on leadership committees** or teams that work on these issues (e.g. your school's improvement plan team, local school board, parent or family action committees, or student government)
- ▶ **Help build momentum** around something you care about by doing research about how it benefits students (better nutrition improves a student's ability to learn!). Then share that information:
 - ▶ Request a meeting to discuss with your principal, leadership team, or PTA
 - ▶ Make flyers to post around school and in the community
 - ▶ Hold an information session to share what you know
 - ▶ Present at a local school board meeting

When meeting with school administrators, it can help to bring other students, other families, mentors, or teachers with you. Build your voice and the impact of your ideas!





Fact Sheet: School Improvement Under ESSA

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

State Decisions

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

Identification of Underperforming Schools

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

School Improvement

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

What is a Tiered System of Support?

Support can mean materials, expert partners, money, training, etc. Sometimes states offer:

- one set of supports to all schools (e.g. a training manual available for download online),
- an additional set for the schools that are below average (e.g. access to a set of training videos), and
- a third, additional set of supports for the schools that are struggling the most (e.g. on-site, in-person training).

This tiered system of support offers different levels of support based on need.

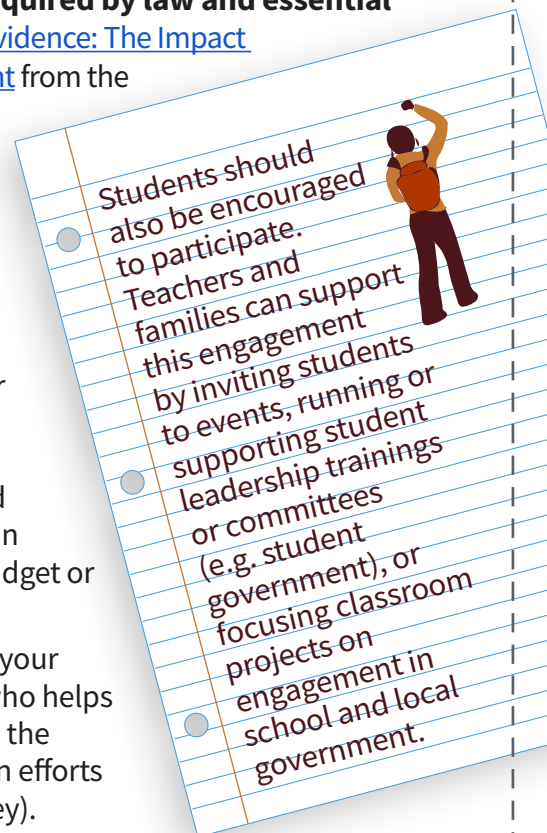
**Find out more about your state’s system of supports for school improvement by checking your state education department’s website or by contacting your school’s leadership team, local school board, or district administrator.*

Fact Sheet: School Improvement Under ESSA



Engagement

- ▶ All **school improvement strategies** must be decided and implemented by school and district administrators (e.g. principals) in collaboration with community members (e.g. students, families, teachers, advocates). **This collaboration (engagement) is both required by law and essential for effecting real change for students.** (Check out [A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement](#) from the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools for why this works)
- ▶ Engagement of the whole school community, however, is not possible without resources. **ESSA includes funding for family engagement**, and many programs include engagement as an allowable use of funds. You can help to increase those resources by:
 - ▶ **Advocating** for additional funding and other resources for your school either from your local district or school (write a letter to your school board, attend or demand meetings with district administrators to address funding, partnerships, contracts, and staffing). You can also push for more funding from the state (join other families and advocates working to change your state's budget or funding formula).
 - ▶ **Taking a leadership role**, either officially (run for office or join your school's Title I School Site Council) or as a community leader who helps to gather families, host events, connect community partners to the school site, write grant applications, or participate in evaluation efforts (e.g. get the word out about results from a school climate survey).
 - ▶ **Connecting funding to engagement** by working with administrators and community leaders to ensure that engagement is written into grant applications, program strategies, and/or school policy.



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

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

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

*From The Leadership Conference Education Fund's [ESSA Guide for Advocates](#) (2017)



Needs Assessments

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

Learning More About Your Community

- ▶ To learn more about what a school needs to better support students, school and district administrators sometimes conduct a “needs assessment.” This is a set of in-depth questions about school environments, teachers and staff, extracurricular programs, coursework, and other information. See the back of this page for key equity terms that might come up.
- ▶ Needs Assessments are required for all schools identified for school improvement under ESSA, and are a best practice for all schools wanting to improve.



As a stakeholder, you can inform a needs assessment by working with your school administrators to add questions, fill it out, help to analyze the results, and/or communicate out what is learned to your community.

Gathering Equity Information

- ▶ There are many ways that school and district officials and administrators gather information about students and the personnel, programs, and policies that support them, including:
 - Rubrics
 - Open-Ended Questions/ Storytelling
 - Surveys
 - In-person conversations
- ▶ Help your school and school community learn more by collecting and sharing **the right information**: information should include both outcomes and inputs so that you know both where there is need and what might be able to fill that need.





Key Terms for Gathering Equity Information:

Standards and Curriculum

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

Assessment

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

Indicators

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

Data

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

School Climate

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

Inputs/Outputs

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



For more Key ESSA Terms, check out The Leadership Conference Education Fund's [ESSA Guide for Advocates](#) (2017), or check out an abridged glossary, on Page 43 of this document.



Use this 2-sided page at a meeting: cut it out, copy, and share!

Opportunities to Promote a Positive School Climate in the Every Student Succeeds Act

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

Measures of School Quality (Indicators)

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

States have already decided what their **accountability indicators** will be. However, states can make changes to their plans through an amendment process. It’s not too late to push for the indicators you want to see in your state’s plan!



DIGNITY IN SCHOOLS

The Dignity in Schools Campaign (dignityinschools.org) envisions an educational system where all schools work toward preventing trauma, repairing harm and promoting healing, and reject a culture of punishment, and criminalization that fuels the school-to-prison pipeline by pushing students out of the classroom and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

In this vision, all schools provide equitable resources—resources like funding, support staff, or positive school discipline interventions.



For more, check out resources from the Dignity in Schools Campaign: dignityinschools.org/take-action/every-student-succeeds-act-essa/



Opportunities to Promote a Positive School Climate in the Every Student Succeeds Act

Supporting Districts to Improve Conditions for Student Learning

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

What is Restorative Justice?

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

State and District Report Cards

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

School Improvement

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



Use this 1-sided page at a meeting: cut it out, copy, and share!

Opportunities to Support Early Learning in the Every Student Succeeds Act

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

ESSA & Early Learning

- ▶ High-quality intervention and education that begins in the first five years and is maintained through the early elementary years can combat achievement gaps that might otherwise begin before children enter kindergarten and sustain as they move throughout K-12.
- ▶ Under ESSA, several sources of funding can be applied to early learning, including:
 - facilities (classrooms, school spaces)
 - educator development and support
 - innovative learning strategies for English learners and children with disabilities
 - improved data systems for young learners
 - expanded access to high-quality early learning opportunities
 - improved transitions into kindergarten
 - engagement of families and community members (check out Title IV Child-Parent Centers! talk to your principal to get more information)
- ▶ Many school districts provide early learning directly, and all districts can partner with local early learning providers to share information on children and families, align standards and expectations, coordinate professional development and supports, and implement systems that support the transition into kindergarten.

Building Bridges from Birth to K-12

- ▶ Creating an aligned system of supports for children and families across the early years and grades means supporting families and young children through not only *access* to childcare and early learning, but also through connection to K-12 public education systems that make sense.
- ▶ **All families—including those with young children—are affected by ESSA, and therefore all *families* can and should be involved in the process of improving schools.**



For more, check out [What Early Learning in ESSA Can Look Like for States and Districts](https://ffyf.org/resources) from the First Five Years Fund at ffyf.org/resources





What Does ESSA Provide Funding For?

- ▶ ESSA is organized into eight “Titles,” each containing a set of requirements that states and districts must follow in order to receive the funding that is allocated to each:

Title I of ESSA

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

Title II of ESSA

This chapter is focused on teacher quality and support for teachers.

Title III of ESSA

This chapter provides funding and requirements related to English learners.

Title IV of ESSA

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

Title V of ESSA

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

Title VI of ESSA

This chapter provides funding and requirements related to American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students.

Title VII of ESSA

This chapter provides funding and requirements for the Impact Aid program, which compensates districts for lost [revenue] due to federal lands.

Title VIII of ESSA

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

***From The Leadership Conference Education Fund’s [ESSA Guide for Advocates](#) (2017)**

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



Titles I and IV of ESSA provide funding to support stakeholder engagement.



Use this 2-sided page at a meeting: cut it out, copy, and share!

Education Governance: Who Affects Policy in Education?

Use this handout as a backgrounder or meeting material for community members who are looking to better understand the governing structures that support their schools.



U.S. Department of Education



State Administration



State Board of Education
State Department of Education

Governor's Office
State Legislators



Local Administration



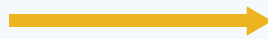
Regional, County, or Area Office of Education



Local Education Agencies (Districts, Charters)



School Boards



Schools



State Administration

- ▶ **Who:** State Department of Education, Office of Public Instruction, Board of Education, Governor's office, and state legislators (state Senate and House of Representatives)
- ▶ **Access Point:** Call your state representatives to learn more and express your opinion. Attend town halls, open meetings, and listening sessions hosted by state leaders.

Local Administration: Districts and Schools

- ▶ **Who:** Regional, county, or area offices of education → Local education Agencies (e.g. districts) → Schools
- ▶ **Access Point:** Request a meeting with your principal, district superintendent, or regional office representative to learn more and express your opinion. (*Check out [Public Impact's building family and community demand for dramatic change in schools and resources](#) from The National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools at sedl.org for more*)

Charter Schools, Networks, and "Authorizers"

- ▶ **Who:** Charter school leaders, national charter networks, Charter Management Organizations (CMOs), and state charter authorizers
- ▶ **Access Point:** Get in touch with the principal or leadership team at the charter school via email, on the phone, or in-person, or contact an authorizer (found on your state agency website) or national office.

Education Governance: Who Affects Policy in Education?



Advocates, Professional Associations, and Business Leaders

- ▶ **Who:** State and local research, nonprofit (e.g. community-based or civil-rights organizations), and/or representative associations (e.g. PTA or teachers' union).
- ▶ **Access Point:** Advocates are often more involved in policy than you might expect, particularly in research and evaluation of local success and providing recommendations to policy leaders. You can inform these efforts by setting up meetings with organization leaders to learn more about what they do, share your stories, and push for action. (*check out NNPS' [School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action](#) for more*)

Alternative Education Leadership

- ▶ **Who:** District leaders, for-profit companies, contractors, or non-profit public health centers that run or administrate alternative education programs for struggling students.
- ▶ **Access Point:** Start by meeting with the school's principal or leadership team. State and district leaders are most often those in charge of contracts with alternative education leaders, and can impact decisions about which schools are available to students and what services can be expected at each school.

Philanthropy and Grant-Making Organizations

- ▶ **Who:** State and local foundations
- ▶ **Access Point:** Community organizations are often funded by philanthropic organizations. Working with philanthropic leaders to improve outcomes, consolidate or collaborate with other local grantees, and better align out-of-school services with on-site services in schools can be an effective way to build up community advocacy and have an impact on education.





Engagement Strategies: Advice for Administrators

Below is a list of recommendations that you can share with school and district administrators to promote greater community involvement. (Check out the NEA's [Parent, Family, Community Involvement in Education](#) and Partners for's [Process and Protest](#) for more)



Reach the Unreached

Prioritize the needs, participation, and leadership of communities that have historically been marginalized and underserved by political decision-making processes.

- ▶ **Conduct Leadership Training:** Develop leadership trainings for school staff and the broader school community to grow existing and emerging leaders. For example, hold diversity and inclusion trainings for school administrators, families, and community groups.
- ▶ **Start with a Question:** Begin by welcoming families and communities and inviting input, rather than beginning with workshops, information sessions, or take-home pamphlets. It can help to enlist the help of trusted messengers like widely known and liked family members, community organizers, teachers, and students themselves.

Show Your Work

Make your decision-making process transparent: all communities should be able to easily see when and how to participate, as well as how participation is valued and has real impact.

- ▶ **Gather Trusted Information:** Invest in evaluation and data efforts that include community members, researchers, and data experts: it is essential that decisions are made based on accurate and relevant information. For example, enlist the support and leadership of trusted families and community members to collect this information (e.g. conduct a school climate survey).
- ▶ **Check for Understanding:** After input sessions, leadership team meetings, and other events, enlist a few leaders to make sure that the information learned and decisions made were accurately reflected in the notes and follow-up action.



Advice for Administrators

Stick With It

Engagement efforts must begin at the earliest planning stages, continue throughout implementation in structured, regular ways, and occur at all levels (federal, state, and local).

- ▶ **Invite Difficult Conversation:** Do not sidestep the hardest conversations; conflict is healthy and addressing difficult issues is essential for breaking down the biggest barriers to trust, collaboration, and success. This might mean conducting a survey among teachers and families to learn more about grievances and holding a school-wide learning session where teachers and families are able to talk through their concerns in person with each other and school leadership. These conversations can benefit from outside moderation.
- ▶ **Use/Create Community Centers:** Partner with community centers of all types (faith-based centers, libraries, community/youth centers, etc.) to expand reach for recruitment into leadership and to share back about progress. To go further, it can be helpful to create a family or community center within a school. Creating designated, safe, and inviting physical space for communities can go a long way to encouraging their involvement.

Maximize Your Resources

Work with outside partners to strengthen your engagement efforts. This can add resources, staff, intellectual capital, and new perspectives.

- ▶ **Ask Us for Help in Making Materials:** Make materials with partners and community leaders that are accessible, available (in print), etc. Involve community members and families early in the process, and make sure that there are opportunities for revision of materials over time.
- ▶ **Focus involvement on student achievement:** Do not limit family, students, or community involvement to fundraising or chaperoning. For example, create an agreement among community members and leaders that is revisited over time that includes specific student, family, teacher, community partner, and school leadership contributions (*Check out [Project Appleseed](#) for more resources on family involvement*)

Double Down

Aggregate and analyze community feedback from separate and parallel efforts to identify areas of agreement, amplify the voices of the underserved, and build support for reform.

- ▶ **Set Up a Leadership Team:** Develop inside/outside leadership teams with representation from the community, including students and families. Additionally, moderate leadership team meetings with third-party partners to promote balance.
- ▶ **Involve Families and Students in Hiring:** Involve community members in staffing and leadership decisions. For example, invite parents to interview teachers that might teach their children and give them the opportunity to ask their own questions.



Use this 2-sided page at a meeting: cut it out, copy, and share!

School Improvement Strategies

What Can You Advocate For?

How can school and district administrators change our communities and schools to better offer students what they need and support their success? Here are a few ideas that you can advocate for with your school and district administrators:

• Improve hiring practices:

- Develop a job description and position pre-requisites in collaboration with parents, students, and school staff (e.g. principals, teachers, counselors, custodians), and involve parents and students in interviews
- Develop and implement a training program for new staff that includes conversations with families, students, and leaders, as well as peer mentorship and additional training to make sure new staff are supported and integrated into the community

• Grow your leadership and staff:

- Offer additional professional development and training for staff around content and culture that includes families, students, and other school community members
- Hire new staff: counselors, social workers, bilingual teachers, additional special education educators, coaches, family engagement coordinators, internship coordinators, college and career advisors, health professionals (nurses, psychiatrists, nutritionists), etc.

• Introduce new and/or different courses or educational opportunities:

- Add additional courses to the schedule for all students, like: performing and visual arts, psychology, civics, coding/programming, economics, parenting, etc.
- Offer advanced coursework, such as online college credit courses, advanced placement courses
- Link up with community businesses or nonprofits to offer students internship opportunities or off-site educational experiences (field trips to museums, factories, aquariums, libraries, etc.)

• Improve school culture:

- Introduce positive discipline through Restorative Justice practices or positive behavior intervention and supports (PBIS), or by connecting students with mental health professionals, counselors, and mentors
- Reduce harmful discipline practices through reducing out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, or reducing police presence in schools
- Create more meaningful opportunities to bring school communities together

School Level Leaders: Who Can I Meet With?

- ✓ School Principal
- ✓ Lead Teacher
- ✓ School Site Coordinator
- ✓ School Board Members
- ✓ District Superintendent
- ✓ District Title I officer
- ✓ District "School Improvement" Team
- ✓ Governor's Office Education Policy Director
- ✓ Union Representative
- ✓ Education Nonprofit Policy Directors



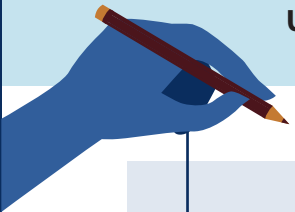
For more about changes to school discipline and policing in schools, check out the Dignity in Schools Campaign's Take Action Resources at dignityinschools.org/take-action/



School Improvement Strategies

Write it Down!

Use this page to learn what plans you can affect, and who in the education community is responsible for those plans



	What can I Affect?	Who to Work With?
District Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ESSA/Federal Funding Application(s) The Local Consolidated Plan (District Funding Application under ESSA) The Comprehensive Support and Improvement Plan (District submission under ESSA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most ESSA funds are distributed to states. These funds are then applied for by LEAs (charter schools, districts, regional offices, or other local education agencies). Work with the district Federal Programs Officer and/or district Superintendent Comprehensive Support and Improvement Plans and Local Consolidated Plans are written by a district-level team, including the district Federal Programs Officer
School Board / School Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted Support and Improvement Plan (School submission under ESSA) The School Mission Statement or School Handbook School Budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted Support and Improvement Plans are written by a school-level team, including the school principal School Boards, principals, and charter school directors are typically those in charge of school handbooks, websites, mission statements, and other school-level decisions School budgets are typically written and/or approved by the local school board or charter school directors
State Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs Assessment Template (state or school) Standards or assessments (state level decisions) State ESSA Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Required needs assessments are often written by the state education agency (SEA), but can be added to or modified by the district office, school board, or school principal State ESSA plans, which include standards and assessments, are written and approved at the state level: the SEA and Governor's Office. Work with the state superintendent's office, the Governor's Office, or state legislators to make changes to the state ESSA plan
Philanthropy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local grant application (philanthropy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grant-making organizations can be found at the national level, state level, and locally



Checklist: How to Make Your Meetings Accessible

Ask school and district administrators to ensure that meetings are accessible to all!

- ✓ **Target outreach** to those whose voices often go unheard.
- ✓ **Make informative materials available:**
 - ✓ Ahead of the meeting (including questions to consider)
 - ✓ In multiple languages and formats in consideration of varied levels of literacy and proficiency
 - ✓ In a format that is easy for all stakeholders to understand
 - ✓ Online
- ✓ Host events in a central, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) **accessible location**, with transportation assistance
- ✓ **Invite interpreters**, including American Sign Language
- ✓ **Provide food**, and include options for those with dietary restrictions
- ✓ **Hold multiple meetings**, held at times when families and teachers can attend
- ✓ **Provide childcare**
- ✓ Provide access to **homework help** at the meeting
- ✓ Send out **multiple reminders** via email, text and on paper
- ✓ **Record** and/or live-stream the event
- ✓ Where money is available, offer to **financially support travel**
- ✓ Ensure that multiple **experts on the issues present**, with time for Q&A

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





Sample Meeting Norms

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

About Meeting Norms

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

Sample List of Norms:

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



Check out Learning Forward's [tool for building meeting norms](https://www.learningforward.org/tool-for-building-meeting-norms) for more, at [learningforward.org](https://www.learningforward.org)!



What Does An Engaged Community Look Like?

"Imagine this: A community comes together to set a vision for its public schools. In local libraries, neighborhood associations, school cafeterias, and places of worship, families sit down together and share their hopes and dreams for their children... Together they talk about what they love about their schools and what they're worried about. They articulate their long-term vision for success—not just for their school or school system, but also for their young people."

- Read more at [TNT.org/Walking-Together](https://www.tntp.org/Walking-Together)



The whole school community must be involved in and lead education policy implementation efforts. Use this set of community goals to get started with a vision of what meaningful engagement looks like to you!

1. Communities Build Trust

School communities must *deliberately build* trust in order to support student success and dignity. **A system of trust includes:**

Competence

hard work, the right resources, and safety

Compassion

go the extra mile to support students

Integrity

follow-through on agreements and feedback

Respect

a culture of listening, participation, and genuine care

(fill in your own!)

2. Community Participation is Inclusive

Those who are involved in administration and decision-making must **reflect the political, racial, income/wealth, language, gender, and cultural diversity** of the school community that they serve.

Ensure that:

- ✓ Administrators invite participation
- ✓ Community members take leadership roles
- ✓ Processes are transparent
- ✓ All community members collaborate with compassion
- ✓ There is time made for feedback

Ask Yourself:

- ? How can I speak up, and make my voice heard?
- ? How can I lift up the voices of those whose have so far been left out?

What Does An Engaged Community Look Like?

3. *Communities Are Empowered to Engage and Lead*

Meaningful engagement means sharing responsibility, power, and voice:

- ✓ All members of the school community have the right to participate in decision-making.
- ✓ To invite participation, school administrators must build shared language around programs and policy.
- ✓ Decision makers at all levels must educate themselves about the needs and assets of their communities, including race and culture.

Students, families, and advocates know their communities; Their empowered participation in impactful decision-making is essential, especially when the conversation focuses on policy, budget, or strategic planning.

What does empowerment mean to you?

4. *Engagement is Strategic and Responsive*

Strategic Means:

- Funded
- Regularly scheduled (e.g. quarterly meetings)
- Run by competent leadership
- Connected to the strategic plan or long-term goals of the school, district, and state
- Inclusive of all stakeholders

Responsive Means:

- Guided by agendas/goals that play to the strengths of participants
- Small enough for individual voices to be heard
- Held at times and in places that make it easy for members to participate
- Connected to relevant issues facing the students and school

5. *Community Members are Involved in Every Part of the Policy Process!*

This means that school community members are involved in understanding information, planning, writing policy and fundraising, budgeting, and implementation of new policy and existing practice!

*Nothing about us
without us!*

What is one thing you can do to be involved right now?

Check out the school improvement process on page 9 to learn more about what to get involved in and how!



Meaningful Engagement in Action:



Dayton Ohio Public Schools' Culturally Relevant Curriculum

Learning More:

Parent organizer Hashim Jabar was volunteering in a 3rd grade classroom during a lesson on genealogy. He watched as a classroom of all Black students read from a handout defining family members—such as uncles, cousins, sisters and brothers—that showed only pictures of white people. It was clear that these images were not relevant to their experience, and children were not engaged as a result. Worse yet, without representation in the classroom, what messages were the students internalizing about themselves and their families?

Setting Goals:

In response to problematic lessons like this one, more and more educators, parents, students and community leaders are calling for schools to adopt a curriculum that is relevant to the students in the classroom. Hashim was no exception.

Making a Plan & Writing it Down:

Hashim's experience led him to run a campaign to introduce culturally relevant curriculum in Dayton Public Schools through his work at the West Dayton Youth Taskforce and Racial Justice NOW!. The campaign included the following strategies:

- ▶ Curriculum review of the school district's books
- ▶ Selection of culturally relevant books and professionally written lesson plans
- ▶ Attendance at School Board meetings to learn about the process for changing the curriculum—urging the Board to add the new books to the high school curriculum; mobilizing community members to speak on behalf of the issue at School Board meetings
- ▶ Presentation to the school district's policy committee to make the case for why the books were chosen and why they should be added to the curriculum; presentation of lesson plans to the school district's curriculum director
- ▶ Following-up with one-on-one meetings with the district superintendent, curriculum director, and elected school board members

Making it Happen:

As a result of this successful campaign, the Dayton Public School Board voted in favor of including two books, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* and *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography* in the high school curriculum.

Key Definitions

Pedagogy - the science and art of education, specifically instructional theory; instructional methods

Culture - the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group

Culturally Relevant Teaching is a term created by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) to describe a way of teaching that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using students' culture to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Culturally relevant teaching means that teachers create a bridge between students' home and school lives, while still meeting the expectations of the district and state curriculum requirements. **You can download the Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Culturally Responsive Schools Toolkit here: dignityinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CRC_Toolkit.pdf**



Meaningful Engagement in Action:

New York City's Young Women's Initiative

In 2014, Girls for Gender Equity (GGE), along with other community leaders, challenged the New York City Council to include the racial and gender justice needs of young women of color within the Young Men's Initiative and national My Brother's Keeper Initiative.

Learning More:

As a public Call to Action, GGE hosted a series of town hall hearings on girls of color in New York City in partnership with the African American Policy Forum (AAPF), dozens of local organizations, Public Advocate Letitia James and New York City Council Member Laurie Cumbo, Chair of the Committee on Women's Issues.

Setting Goals:

Following the hearings, the NYC Council Speaker staff and GGE met to share a vision for a dedicated initiative for young women and girls of color.

Making a Plan:

In March 2015, Girls for Gender Equity, the New York Women's Foundation, and the NoVo Foundation met with the Speaker's office to present a brief and discuss local and national efforts to build an agenda for young women and girls. In May 2015, City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito announced that the City Council would launch a Young Women's Initiative (YWI) focused on changing the lives of young women and girls of color. Along with Council Members Julissa Ferreras-Copeland, Elizabeth Crowley, Laurie Cumbo, and Darlene Mealy, Speaker Mark-Viverito presented an empowering vision before an audience of over 2,000 leaders of community-based organizations and philanthropic partners who gathered for the New York Women's Foundation's annual Celebrating Women Breakfast. Beginning in September 2015, over 200 stakeholders, City Council staff, and young people themselves met numerous times over a six month period to develop policy, programs, data and resource recommendations focused on lifting up young women and girls of color in New York City.

Writing it Down:

In May 2016, the New York City Council released [New York City Young Women's Initiative Report & Recommendations](#) that included 80+ policy, program, legislative data and budgetary recommendations from all 5 work groups and Overarching Recommendations.

Making it Happen:

In August 2016, Girls for Gender Equity began the Young Women's Advisory Council 2.0 (YWAC) so the young women can continue to serve as strategic partners to city agencies, philanthropy and community members. YWAC acts in the capacity of advisory and accountability team as policy and program recommendations are implemented throughout New York City.

YWI Stakeholders continue to track these recommendations and work together to ensure that YWI meaningfully remains a part of the landscape of New York City.



ESSA: Local Engagement Requirements



The following handout outlines areas of the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* where local-level stakeholder engagement is required. It is important to keep in mind that while the following engagement opportunities are explicitly outlined in ESSA, all efforts to support schools and students will be more effective, meaningful, and lasting with explicit and ongoing community engagement.

Consolidated Plans (Title I)

- LEAs must engage a variety of stakeholders in developing their Consolidated LEA Plan, and must periodically review and revise this plan [\[Section 1112\(a\)\(1\)\(A\)\]](#).
- The Consolidated LEA Plan must describe strategies to be used to effectively transition students to postsecondary education and career, which could include coordination with institutions of higher education, employers, or other local partners. The plan must also describe how the LEA will coordinate with early childhood education programs [\[Section 1112\(b\)\(6\)\]](#).

School Improvement (Title I)

Schools Identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement

LEAs must:

- develop Comprehensive Support and Improvement Plans for all schools identified by the State and must partner with stakeholders to develop and implement these plans [\[Section 1111\(d\)\(1\)\(A\)\]](#).

Schools Identified for Targeted Support and Improvement

LEAs must:

- monitor each Targeted Support and Improvement Plan developed by identified schools and relevant stakeholders [\[Section 1111\(d\)\(2\)\(B\)\]](#) and these plan provisions to ensure that, among other requirements, schools identify eligible children most in need of services under targeted support and improvement [\[Section 1112\(b\)\(7\)\]](#).

LEA plan provisions must include strategies for implementing effective parent and family engagement strategies; supporting, coordinating, and integrating with early childhood education programs; and facilitating effective transitions to high school and postsecondary institutions [\[Section 1112\(b\)\(7\)\]](#). LEAs must also support participating schools in planning and implementing family engagement strategies, potentially collaborating with other stakeholders with expertise in this area [\[Section 1116\]](#).

Weighted Funding Flexibility Pilot (Title I)

With regard to Flexibility for Equitable Per-Pupil Funding, LEAs must consult with stakeholders in developing and implementing the local flexibility demonstration for weighted per-pupil funding [\[Section 1501\(d\)\(1\)\(G\)\]](#).



ESSA: Local Engagement Requirements

Teachers and Leaders (Title II)

LEAs must consult with a range of stakeholders in developing applications for Title II formula funds, seek advice on how to improve activities, and describe how data and ongoing consultation will be used to continuously improve Title II local activities [Section 2101(b)(2)].

English Learners (Title III)

LEAs must use Title III funds for parent and family engagement activities related to English learners, among other required uses of funds [Section 3115(c)(3)(A)].

For subgrants serving immigrant students, LEAs (and other eligible entities) must also describe how they will promote parent, family, and community engagement, and how they consulted with stakeholders in developing their Title III plans [Section 3115(g)(3)].

Supporting 21st Century Schools (Title IV)

LEAs must consult stakeholders in developing a Title IV plan for Safe and Healthy Schools and Well-Rounded Education, and consult them on an ongoing basis while implementing strategies and programs under Title IV [Section 4106(c)(1)], and LEAs may receive training in all family engagement policies, programs, and activities through partnerships with family engagement centers [Section 4501(1)].

An LEA may:

- use Safe and Healthy Schools funds to designate a coordinator to engage the community by building partnerships and strengthening relationships and supports between schools and communities [Section 4108(5)(H)];
- be consulted in the development of needs and assets analysis for the Promise Neighborhoods Program [Section 4624(a)(4)(B)]; and/or
- be included in an applicant's explanation of how a Promise Neighborhood will establish and continue family and community engagement including involving representative participation from the neighborhood, among other activities [Section 4624(a)(9)(A)].

Additionally, Full Service Community Schools applications that include broad stakeholders – which may include LEAs – receive priority [Section 4625(b)(2)].



Read the full text of the law at www.ed.gov/essa.

A Glossary of ESSA Terms

Adapted from the [ESSA Guide for Advocates](#), a publication from
The Leadership Conference Education Fund,
found at civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/education/ESSA/ESSA-Guide.pdf

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

academic standards

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

accountability

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

additional targeted support and improvement schools

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

assessment

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

chronic absenteeism

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

comprehensive support and improvement schools

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

A Glossary of ESSA Terms

disaggregated data

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

English-language proficiency

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

English learner (EL)

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

indicators

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

individualized educational program (IEP)

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

local educational agency (LEA)

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

n-size

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

needs assessment

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

A Glossary of ESSA Terms

participation rate

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

state educational agency (SEA)

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

state school rating system

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

subgroup

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

Report Cards

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

The data that must be reported includes:

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

See page 10 of The Leadership Conference Education Fund's *ESSA Guide for Advocates* for more on School Report Cards



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A Glossary of ESSA Terms

support and improvement plan

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

targeted support and improvement schools

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

A Glossary of ESSA Terms

Components of ESSA

Title I of ESSA

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

Title II of ESSA

This chapter is focused on teacher quality and support for teachers.

Title III of ESSA

This chapter provides funding and requirements related to English learners.

Title IV of ESSA

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

Title V of ESSA

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

Title VI of ESSA

This chapter provides funding and requirements related to American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students.

Title VII of ESSA

This chapter provides funding and requirements for the Impact Aid program, which compensates districts for lost revenue due to federal lands.

Title VIII of ESSA

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



Read the full text of the law at www.ed.gov/essa.



About the Authors

The Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC)

DSC is a coalition of over 100 grassroots and education advocacy organizations in 29 states. Since its inception in 2006, DSC members have worked to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline by challenging the systemic problem of unfair school discipline policies that push students out of our nation's schools and by advocating for high-quality educational environments that keep students in school and learning.

DSC members were actively engaged in the crafting of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), a federal education law that replaces the No Child Left Behind Act and provides much needed funding and resources to schools serving low-income students and students of color.

NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF)

Founded in 1940 by Thurgood Marshall, LDF is the nation's oldest civil rights law organization. For almost 80 years, LDF has relied on the Constitution and federal and state civil rights laws to pursue equality and justice for African-Americans and other people of color. LDF litigated and won the historic U.S. Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, which instituted the principle of equal access to education for all students and banned racial segregation in our nation's schools. Since *Brown*, LDF has continued to represent students in school districts to ensure they receive quality and equitable educational opportunities.

Partners for Each and Every Child (Partners for), a project of the Opportunity Institute

A project of the Opportunity Institute, Partners for Each and Every Child (Partners for) is a collaborative, nonpartisan network of education researchers, advocacy organizations, and policy experts who are committed to educational excellence for each and every child. The network grew out of the work of the Congressionally chartered national Commission for Equity and Excellence in Education. Our mission is to build an infrastructure of interconnected work that will encourage a growing portion of the education policy community to break down barriers to advance sound educational policies, attentive to matters of equity and responsive to the needs of at-risk, under-served, and politically underrepresented students.

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