

DIGNITY IN SCHOOLS

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The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) FAQ on School Climate and Discipline Reform

1. *What is the ESSA?*

The ESSA is the most recent version of the **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965**, replacing No Child Left Behind (NCLB). ESEA governs federal K-12 funding and places conditions on state receipt of funding. Currently, 42 states and the District of Columbia are receiving waivers from NCLB. These waivers will expire **August 1, 2016**.

2. *What does ESSA say about school climate and school discipline reform?*

ESSA gives states the option of choosing school climate and safety as an indicator of overall of school quality and student success. This is an advocacy opportunity to urge states to choose this indicator. However, we have to be clear about what positive and inclusive school climate means—it means implementing discipline alternatives, like restorative practices, instead of practices that push children out of school.

3. *What school climate and discipline reform programs does ESSA provide funding for?*

ESSA allows states to use federal funds to implement programs that promote positive and inclusive school climates and reduce the use of exclusionary discipline, like: Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS); professional development on classroom management; school-based mental health care; trauma-informed services; partnerships with community-based organizations; parent and family engagement programs; site resource coordinators; and conflict resolution and crisis intervention. We must urge states and Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) to use funds to implement these alternatives.

4. *What are key points for intervention for DSC members?*

State Plans - You must identify who in your state will be writing your state plan (i.e. your state school superintendent, school districts leaders) and ensure that you are involved in the process to develop the state plan—with meaningful input. This will give you the opportunity to advocate for inclusion of school climate and safety as an indicator for school quality and student success, for meaningful parent and family engagement policies and programs, and funding of positive discipline programs. States will soon start working on their plans, which are due August 1, 2016.

Federal Regulations - We will notify you of opportunities to submit written comments and to participate in public meetings on the law hosted by the Department of Education (ED). ED will be developing regulations and guidelines to states to implement ESSA—and this is our chance to weigh in.

Federal Peer Review Teams - Please let us know if you are interested in participating in the Multi-disciplinary Peer Review teams that ED will be convening to review state plans. We will forward DSC members names for consideration.

Ongoing Funding and Implementation – At the state and local level, DSC members can continue advocating for funding of positive discipline programs practices funded under ESSA. DSC members can also participate in district-level **needs assessments** required before districts can receive ESSA money from the state. These assessments are intended to identify lower performing schools and help to target funding and needed interventions—this is another chance to advocate for funding of programs to improve school climate and student achievement. LEAs are required to conduct needs assessments every 3 years under the law.