



Every Student Succeeds Act

School Climate in State Accountability Systems and Plans



The Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC) is a national coalition of over 100 organizations in 30 states dedicated to dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline. DSC fights for the human right of every young person to a quality education and to be treated with dignity.

In December 2015, Congress passed and President Obama signed into law the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), which replaces No Child Left Behind. DSC members were actively engaged in the crafting of ESSA, which includes several important provisions relating to school climate and discipline. States are now in the process of developing their ESSA plans to submit to the U.S. Department of Education on April 3 or September 18, 2017. Plans are effective beginning in the 2017-18 school year. ESSA requires states to collect community input as they develop their plans.

This tool, co-authored by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF), details recommendations that parents, students, educators, advocates and other stakeholders can present to state education officials as they develop their state accountability systems and plans.

States are now developing their ESSA plans to submit to the U.S. Department of Education in April or September 2017. Make your voice heard!

1. Ensure that Parents, Students and other Community Stakeholders Are Meaningfully Engaged throughout the ESSA Implementation Process

- ESSA requires state education departments to engage in timely and meaningful consultation with community stakeholders as they develop their state plans.ⁱ
- Methods for collecting community feedback could include focus groups, surveys following stakeholder meetings and posted online, and written comments submitted after meetings, including by email.
- We recommend that states make plans available for public comment at least 60 days prior to submission to the U.S. Secretary of Education, which would give stakeholders time to ask questions and submit comments.

2. Select, Define and Advance Positive School Climates as a Measure of School Quality

- ESSA requires states to use a minimum of four accountability indicators, including a measure of school quality or student success, in their accountability systems. States have the option to measure school quality by using measures of “school climate and safety”.ⁱⁱ
- We recommend that states select “school climate and safety” as an accountability indicator and consult with community stakeholders to develop a definition of positive school climate to incorporate in their state plans.

- DSC’s *Model Code on Education and Dignity* urges states and districts to create a climate where students feel socially, emotionally and physically safe, there is mutual respect between teachers, students, parents or guardians, and students’ self-expression and self-esteem are supported.ⁱⁱⁱ
- To evaluate this indicator, states should measure school climate by analyzing the discipline data that ESSA requires states to publish in annual report cards (i.e. suspensions, expulsions, school-based arrests, and referrals to law enforcement), as well using school climate surveys.

3. Include Positive School Climates as a Support and Improvement Strategy and Target ESSA Funds to Address School Climate Issues

- When a school is identified for comprehensive support and improvement, the district must work with the community to conduct a needs assessment and develop an improvement plan with evidence-based interventions.^{iv}
- States should encourage districts to consider school climate indicators (e.g. discipline data, student surveys, school climate walkthroughs, etc.) in needs assessments and include strategies to promote positive school climate in their improvement plans.
- Improvement plans should aim to reduce exclusionary discipline and disparities across race, gender, and disability.
- States should encourage schools and districts to request funding for restorative practices and schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SWPBIS) in improvement plan requests.

ESSA requires states to describe how they will improve environments for student learning, including by reducing discipline that removes students from the classroom.

4. Ensure that Justice-Involved Students Receive Quality Instruction and Seamlessly Re-enroll into the Public Educational Systems

- ESSA requires states requesting Title I part D funds to establish procedures to ensure the timely re-enrollment of students who become involved in the juvenile justice system.^v States should encourage districts to analyze discipline data and school climate surveys in assessments.
- States should implement policies that improve the quality of coursework offered in facilities and ensure alignment with challenging state academic standards.
- These policies should help system-involved students access quality instruction, re-enroll in school, gain a high school diploma, and go on to attain employment or postsecondary credentials.

5. Ensure Accountability for the Success of Each Subgroup of Students

- ESSA requires states to capture and report the performance of all students and student subgroups (e.g. major racial groups and economically disadvantaged students).^{vi}
- The law requires states to determine, in consultation with stakeholders, the number of students (n-size) in a given subgroup that will require states to include that group for accountability and reporting purposes.^{vii}
- States should set an n-size as small as possible to ensure that subgroups are not excluded from accountability systems; there is research supporting an n-size of 10.^{viii}

ⁱ Every Student Succeeds Act, Public Law No. 114.95, S. 1177, 114th Cong. §1111(a)(1)(A) (Dec. 10, 2015).

ⁱⁱ *Id.* at §1111(c)(4)(B).

ⁱⁱⁱ The Dignity in Schools Campaign, *A Model Code on Education and Dignity*, Revised October 2013, at 18, www.dignityinschools.org/files/Model_Code_2013.pdf.

^{iv} ESSA, *supra* note 1 at §1111(d)(1)(B).

^v *Id.* at §1414(a)(1)(E)(i).

^{vi} *Id.* at §1111(c)(2).

^{vii} *Id.* at §1111(c)(3)(A)(ii).

^{viii} See, e.g., Jessica Cardichon, *Ensuring Equity in ESSA: The Role of N-Size in Subgroup Accountability*, Alliance for Excellent Education, 7 (June 2016). <http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/NSize.pdf>.